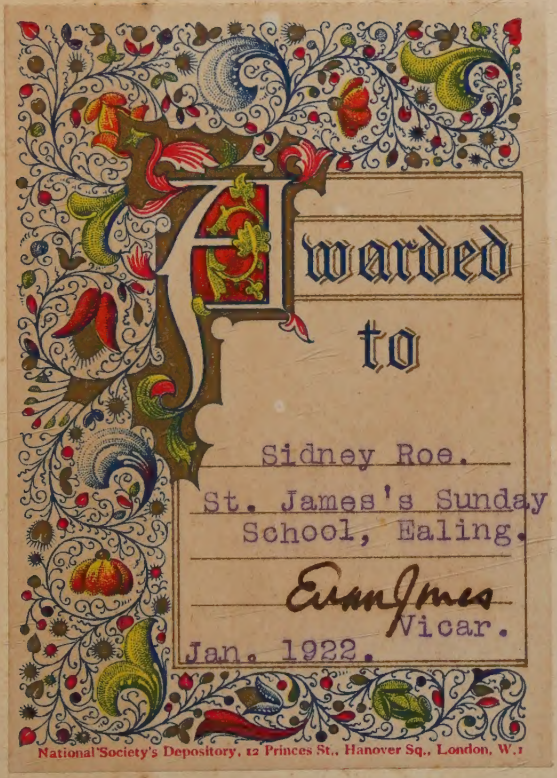
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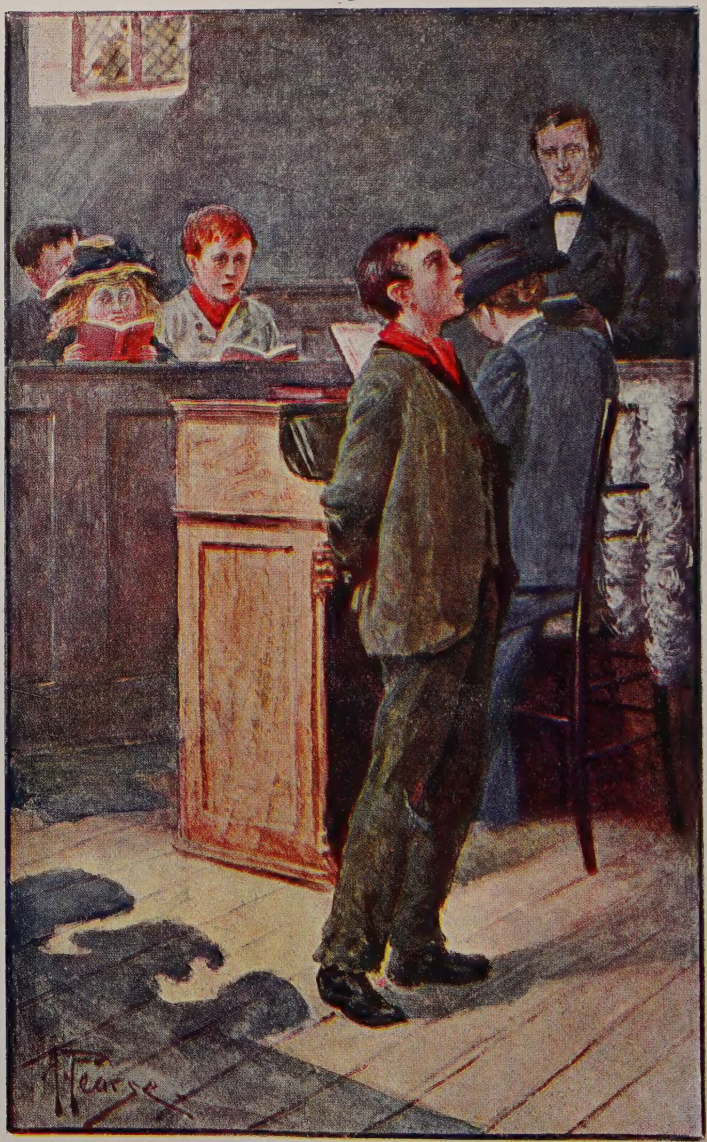

THE SECOND VERSE HE TOOK AS A SOLO.

DIBS

A Story of Young London Life

By

JOSEPH JOHNSON

(OF SALE)

Author of "Young Small Shoes," "The Master's Likeness," "Uncle Ben's Stories," etc.

TENTH IMPRESSION

R.T.S., 4, Bouverie Street, London, E.C. 4.

Dedicated

TO HOURS OF SERVICE AND COMMUNION SPENT WITH

HER

WHO WAS TO ME

'OF ALL THE LANDS OF THE WHOLE EARTH AND OF ALL

THE FLOWERS THEREOF

ONE LILY.'

CONTENTS.

CHAP.		PAGE
	THE PROLOGUE	7
I.	THE CROWN	9
II.	HE CARETH	22
III.	SILLY BILLY	33
IV.	PROMOTED TO THE CHOIR	47
V.	MANY CROWNS	60
VI.	OUT TO TEA	74
VII.	THE SQUIB AND THE MOUSE	88
VIII.	UNANSWERED YET	98
IX.	THE CRISIS	109
X.	EXCOMMUNICATED	119
XI.	THE THEATRE	131
XII.	NEVERTHELESS AFTERWARD	144
	THE EPILOGUE	157

PROLOGUE.

THIS simple story is an attempt to set forth the irresistible influence of the true Spirit of Jesus Christ over the life of a wild and wayward boy of the London streets who had in him true and clear grit of character, with a spark of real genius of song. And it is further intended to show how, by grace of the same Spirit, through seeming failure those things which are grievous to be borne will 'nevertheless afterward yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.'

DIBS.

CHAPTER I.

THE CROWN.

'Soon we'll be in London Town,
Sing, my lads, Yeo ho!
And see the king in a golden crown,
Sing, my lads, Yeo ho!
Heave ho! on we go,
Sing, my lads, Yeo ho!
Who's afeard to meet the foe?
Sing, my lads, Yeo ho!'

CHARING CROSS seemed one mass of people, a vast and motley throng spread itself all over the wide pavement of Trafalgar Square; the rough element of the London streets had gathered in great force; Dr. Kenealy was to address a mass meeting of the friends of the Claimant, and the crowd waited in eager expectation of the event. Parliament Street looked alive with a closely-packed throng, right down to West-

minster. Nelson from his lofty eminence, and the great lions of Landseer far below at his feet, watched the animated scene with their usual repose. The crowd by the Horse Guards was one dense swarm of living beings, and all along St. James's Park right up to Buckingham Palace the sea of heads continued.

The Queen was going to open Parliament in person. The weather had been cold and dull, with a little rain in the forenoon. But the clouds lifted, and the sky brightened, so that 'Queen's weather' appeared as specially ordered for the afternoon. The crowd was moving freely about, observing with interest the handsome carriages and magnificent liveries that rolled along towards the Houses of Parliament, among them Lord Beaconsfield's bays, and the ambassadors' equipages from most of the Courts of Europe. A squadron of the Lifeguards passed in glittering array; after them followed many attendants on foot, among whom were a party of boys ragged and dirty. On reaching Carlton Gardens these lads made a dash across the road to a tree not yet occupied by ambitious sightseers.

The boys ran towards the tree with very great promptness, and with nimble dexterity commenced the business of lumping one another up until the branches were reached; some three or four, having attained the lowest branch, were struggling and writhing to climb to serener heights. As one urchin was ascending, with

scarcely two threads whole in any garment he possessed, a man below said: 'Look out, Tommy—mind you don't spoil your clothes!'

'Well, guv'nor, *you* couldn't wear your best things, for I guess they are up the "spout,"' retorted the biggest of the group, who was trying to swing and sway himself up on the branch from which he was hanging with his hands.

You boys won't be up there long—here's the perlice,' was the rejoinder. And in another moment a couple of constables dashed on the scene and round the trunk of the tree, scattering the two or three who were beginning the ascent, and pulling the others down who had just attained the lower boughs; one boy dropped off through fright; another almost escaped, but his legs could be reached by the stick the policeman had. He made a brave defence for his position, though at last compelled to surrender, doing his best to give by accident the gentleman in blue a kick as he descended. But he came down too fast for that, and hurriedly picked himself up when he came into collision with the earth, and decamped with all speed, as the policeman was saying, 'Come! off you go, or I'll start you. I told you we'd have all them boys off there like ripe cherries.'

'No,' said the other, 'there's one on 'em still up there, a little nipper.'

'Ullow, you young varmint, come down there!'

'Not till you fetch me, bobby,' piped up a shrill voice

'I'll fetch yer when yer do come down,' replied the policeman.

'Dibs,' shouted the retreating boy, 'stick to the tree; them bobbies can't touch you; we'll come back for you.'

'I'll wait here,' said the larger of the two policemen; 'them young monkeys will be back here before long.' But this guardian angel was unable to keep his promise, being needed elsewhere.

Soon after this incident the mounted police cleared the way, and the people fell back, and that wonderful avenue of living faces was formed from end to end of the line of march. Then came the eager expectation, the pushing forward from behind, with all the other familiar features of a London crowd waiting for a sight.

The funny man, who makes jokes for his neighbours by his remarks on other people, and his chaff with the nearest policeman, was there; the woman who kept on saying, 'Just mind who you are shoving!' the individual with a bag that gets in everybody's way; and the costermongers' carts for people to stand up in were coming behind the standing fringe of sightseers, and the owners shouting, ''Ere you are, fust-class view, sixpence each!' the false alarms—but at last the cheering is distinct; the cry is, 'There, they are a-coming now!' Strains of martial music are heard, and the shout runs along, 'Here they are!'

Then the stately pageant appeared full in view; Colonel Henderson, Chief Commissioner of the Police,

in cocked hat, had galloped along the line of march, and now four mounted police ride slowly in front. A space, and then the band of the mounted Lifeguards; the Royal Heralds, with their silver trumpets and bannerets; the sumptuous state carriages; the brilliant livery of scarlet-and-gold; the old-fashioned Beefeaters, who in ancient days were waiters at the sideboard at Court feasts, and hence were called *buffetiers*, and at the same time served as Yeomen of the Guard; then, behind all the principal officers of State, the Royal carriage drawn by eight magnificent horses, richly caparisoned, each led by a groom, moved slowly along. In this sat the Queen—the chief personage in this vast British empire—wearing the Crown of England. The hats of the crowd went off, and the cheers rose 'like billows on the shore.' A bevy of officers in gorgeous uniforms and feathers followed close behind the Queen; then came the clatter of a troop of Lifeguards in shining armour and tossing plumes, another squadron of cavalry, and the procession had passed. And soon after, the guns from the Tower announced that Parliament had been opened by Her Majesty.

Dibs waited patiently for the return of the great display, which was quite too utterly superb in his eyes to be missed, although he was so cramped in his position that he could hardly hold on for five minutes, when his attention was not absorbed. The actions of the crowd below, and the various scenes near and far, occu-

pied him, with occasional changes from agony in one arm to agony in the other, so that he was enabled to endure and watch for the return of the procession. It was not our 'Sovereign Lady Queen Victoria,' nor yet the whole Royal family, which formed the chief object of interest to the boy. It was the crown that was the glory of the whole affair. Once more it passed before him, the earthly sign of all the grandeur this world can give, and he gazed with unmitigated admiration, and with a half superstitious awe, on this highest symbol of power and fame. He did not know the significance it had politically or historically, nor did he picture the importance of the scene he had witnessed. He did not know how often monarchs had gone from Buckingham Palace and to Westminster with beating heart because of the cares and sorrows that came with that crown; but he did feel a thrill of patriotism when the retinue swept by again, and he saw the crown of Old England. He bawled 'hooo-ra' until the last dance of the cavalry plumes had vanished from his sight.

The compact mass of people was dissolving, the crowd spreading themselves in every direction. Dibs, finding that he was unobserved by the police, made all haste to come down. He was afraid to linger about lest the policeman who had threatened to wait should suddenly put in an appearance again. He felt it would be folly to stay there till his companions found him; so at once he descended, and mingled with the moving

multitude, and began looking out for his friends, at the same time amusing himself by observing all that passed around him. He had no engagement, being distinctly a gentleman of leisure, and wandered about the Park with more freedom and content than scores of people who had no higher aims in life, and who had witnessed the spectacle because they had nothing else to do, or, if they had, always chose pleasure to the neglect of duty when they could.

Gradually the Park began to assume its more ordinary appearance; and as all chance of further excitement seemed to vanish, Dibs, having nothing to call him homeward until the pangs of hunger became master of the situation, strolled off to the pond to view the ducks. Here he discovered a large assortment of individuals, whose main object in life might be said to be killing time, to many of whom the casual ward of the workhouse was an hotel, without the inconvenience of a bill, but whose lives were not necessarily more vicious than the unemployed of the 'upper ten.'

Popular London sights bring together the extremes of London Society; they are the great events for the do-nothings of Club life, and for the loafer of the lodging-houses. The scum from the West End, and the dregs from the East End, have much in common, gold making the chief difference. In the one case the idleness is veneered, and has the guilt of being chosen; in the other it is ghastly, but less guilty, for often it is

without choice. The swells had mostly withdrawn from the Park, and Dibs, more interested in the ducks of gorgeous plumage than in the bystanders, having secured a handful of small stones, was standing on the bridge that crosses the narrow part of the pond, and about to discharge his ammunition in any way which might seem most productive of fun or mischief, when suddenly one of his companions caught sight of him, and coming up quickly, said :—

'Did you see the old gal ?'

'And the crown on top of 'er 'ed ?' rejoined Dibs, dropping a small stone just to rearwards of a duck.

'It *was* a small 'un. I expected ter see a whop-per.'

'Perhaps,' replied Dibs, 'this 'ere ain't her best one.'

'The one in the Tower is a sight bigger than the one she had to-day.'

'What do you think the old gal does with it when she don't wear it ?' asked Dibs.

'I know what I should do,' said the friend. 'I should put it up the spout.'

'It's a mighty fine thing to wear a crown, though I shouldn't like to be the only chap to sport one.'

'I should, though,' rejoined his friend. 'A crown ain't any better than a hat, if everybody wears one.'

'Now then, move on, you boys!' said a policeman slowly advancing ; and, well-accustomed to the command, they obeyed. After fruitlessly looking around for their pals, and when the dull grey winter's afternoon had

settled down for the night into a chill drizzle that forced the lads to think of food and shelter, they left the Park, and went down Birdcage Walk, then over Westminster Bridge to the Obelisk, by the Elephant and Castle, along the Old Kent Road, then across the Blue Anchor Road, until they came to the Neckinger Road. There, at the entrance to a court not far from the Star Music Hall, the boys were about to part when Dibs said:

'How does your teacher know all about them crowns?'

'I don't know. I suppose he gets it out of a book. You 'ad better come and hear for yerself.'

'I don't want to go to no Sunday-school,' rejoined Dibs.

'I don't go for the teaching; but yer gets a treat in summer, and a tea in winter; besides, it's warm, and out of the wet; they 'as heaps of singing, although it ain't quite so lively as the gaf.'

'They sings, do they?' repeated Dibs. 'I'll come next Sunday for a lark. I'll meet you, Crop, and go along with you.' Then off he darted to the place which was his home, leaving Crop to proceed alone towards his destination.

Dibs entered a small and dirty house, and opened the door of one of the downstairs rooms, wherein was a bed which occupied nearly all the space; a small table stood against the dirty window, one pane of which had received the honourable distinction of a star, the

centre of which contained a dab of putty, from whence the rays streamed; a rickety wash-stand, a chair that had once been a cane-bottom one, but the cane was gone, and the seat was now covered by a board. A stool and a box completed the furniture of the home.

Dibs at once began to collect the elements for making a fire from the box, which was coal-cellar and wood-house in one, and proceeded to collect what scraps of food he could find in the cupboard, which was a fixture between the fireplace and the wall; and while he is preparing supper we will make what acquaintance with him is possible.

There is no striking feature about his history; no wonderful romance; no materials for a great drama; only the commonplace story of poverty—not beautiful, saintly poverty, as sought and found by the good monks and fathers of old, but the bare, bleak poverty of necessity, touching the border of hunger and filth, surrounded by oaths and curses, and blended with vice and crime. It was not righteous, noble, heroic destitution, nor was it total wretchedness and misery. It had its better side, the careless, happy forgetfulness of to-morrow, with times of real mirth, together with a general and cheerful adaptation to the circumstances of the lot in life.

Here Dibs lived; the School Board, which has wrought so great a change among such lads, had not yet got into fair working order, and so, although in nominal atten-

dance at a school near, he never allowed any scholastic privileges to interfere with or entice him from the more important pursuit of enjoyment. He considered it one of the first duties, after being always ready for a meal never to miss any sight that cost nothing to see; consequently his school attendance was irregular.

He did not know anything about his earliest days. His father rarely referred to his mother, and he could hardly remember her, for she died when he was a child. Since her death, which left a strange blank in his life, the place of their residence had been changed, so that no friends or neighbours talked to him about her, but from a scar he carried on his head from a blow his mother had given him when he was hardly more than an infant, he fancied that drink had blighted their home, cursed his mother's life, dragged her down to the grave, withered his father's heart so that the better nature was almost dried up, and left him an orphan wastrel in a life of poverty.

His father's name was Mark Sewell. He worked at one of the South London Theatres, and was seldom home till one or two in the morning during the season; but the employment was irregular, and he was sometimes out of work for weeks together, and his pay at best was small. Father and son lived together. Very frequently the lines fell to them in rough places, and their heritage seemed very hard, although when wages did come in the father tried to pay up arrears, and walked over to

Whitechapel to leave his mother, who lived with a widowed daughter and four children, a shilling whenever he could. It did not seem possible, even had he wished, to lay up for what people call 'a rainy day,' because the rainy days were so many. With those who live just above abject poverty it scarcely seems worth while to save. Never having been trained to it, they find the effort is too hard. Sad as is this side of life, there is often with it a pathetic freedom from care that 'takes no thought for to-morrow' because 'sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof;' and with this unconscious fulfilment of Divine words there come two blessings; the first, pity for those worse off than themselves, and then, generous help. This bond of sympathy in common suffering has the reconciling spirit of tender mercy.

The lot of father and son was no uncommon one. They had been born and bred in the dark atmosphere of London poverty. They were used to the load they bore. Neither of them reflected on the problems of life and the inequalities that are so unlike the Kingdom of Heaven. Dibs had many a rough time—he often suffered from cold and hunger; but knowing others were worse off than he was, he did not think of misfortune in the light of care and grief. He resisted all physical ill, resented all wrongs as far as he could, fought every foe to the utmost of his strength, and endeavoured to live as jolly a life as circumstances made possible.

When Dibs had finished all he could find to eat, as

the rain kept on he crept into bed and fell asleep, to dream of crowns of pure gold radiant in light. He knew nothing of other crowns—of wild olive, of flowers, of orange-blossom, of bay-leaves or laurel, of joy and gladness, of reward or heroism; nothing of the martyr's crown, of sorrow or cypress, of suffering or thorns; nothing of what the poets or painters have told us, nothing of what the Book says about the crown of life. As the night wrack descended on the great city, palace and prison were wrapt in the black mantle of darkness, and the wide inky river rushed on to the sea. Dibs slept and dreamed; his father came home through the drenching rain and empty silent streets; nothing disturbed him. The balm God gives to His beloved He gave to Dibs, and in it came the vision of many crowns, but all of pure gold. Was it all an idle fancy, or was the veil uplifted? Was it a prophecy that some day

'One would crown him king, far in the spiritual city'?

CHAPTER II.

HE CARETH.

'Jesus came, the heavens adoring,
Came with peace from realms on high.
Hallelujah!
Came in deep humility.'

TRUE to his appointment, Dibs was waiting for his companion near the Sunday-school on the following Sunday afternoon. He had not long to stand observing the small struggling crowd that were watching for the door to be opened, for, just as the rough and noisy group of children rushed into the dingy place of worship which served for both chapel and school, Crop came in sight. After they had lingered a short time on the threshold, Mr. Jarman, the teacher, appeared upon the scene. He was a kind-hearted, earnest, bustling man, with red hair, and a short, coarse, porcupine beard, that was kept clipped, as if to prevent its becoming dangerous. On entering he said—

'Well, boys, come along in with me. It's better to wait in the House of God than to play about the streets.'

Dibs followed his friend, and, seeing the others taking

off their caps, he pulled his off. The teacher and two or three boys entered a square pew near the top-end of the dark and dirty-looking chapel. Several classes of boys were sitting on the same side of the aisle, the girls on the other side of the old-fashioned gallery; in the middle were several pewfuls of infants, and behind them some elder classes of young men and women. The teacher, on arriving within the square pew, drew a box-stool from under the seat, unlocked it, took out some books, put his hat in the place where the books were, and then sat down on the box and covered his face with his hand, and leant forward. Dibs was much interested in these preliminary exercises, and, nodding toward the teacher, he whispered to Crop—

'He ain't took poorly?'

'No,' said Crop, 'he's only a-praying.'

When Mr. Jarman removed his hand, he turned to Crop, and asked, 'Is this a new boy? Is he a friend of yours?'

'Yes, he's coming along with me, for the first time, to see how he likes it,' replied Jimmy Dibble, who was better known as Crop.

'What's your name, my lad?'

'Dibs; but I ain't *your* lad,' was the reply—greatly enjoyed by those who were in the class.

'He's called Dibs, teacher, 'cause he can play "knuckle bones" better 'an any other chap about here, and he can fight any one twice 'is size and weight. He'll be

a Jem Mace by and by; he's as good as Darling Joe's boy now.'

'Teacher,' interposed another boy, 'he's only called Dibs like Jimmy Dibble is called Crop. You know why he was called Crop, 'cause he was onfortunate, and got in a row, and went to the Queen's Hotel, and had 'is 'air cut by the royal barber.'

A bell was rung by a man who stood behind a table with a desk on it underneath the pulpit. He was the superintendent of the school. His name was Mr. Snowls, 'Old Snowls,' he was generally called, because his son, who officiated as librarian, was called 'Young Snowls.' Mr. Jarman called for silence; so the conversation was stopped. The secretary walked down and closed the doors. The bell was sounded the second time.

'Silence!' shouted the superintendent. And quiet gradually stole over the school. 'There, now, that will do, Fredy Steel. All eyes look this way. George Tice, if I see you at that game again, I'll have you out here before all the school. Hymn 25—Jane Warton, don't tear your sister's hat; she'll be good enough, if you let her alone.'

The tune was played over by a young lady who 'managed the harmonium' in the table-pew.

'Rise,' said Mr. Snowls; and the singing went off in a lively way—'Children of Jerusalem.'

Dibs was very pleased with the chorus. 'Hark! Hark! Hark!' was quite a feature, and before the last verse he

was joining in with the 'Loud Hosanna' to the very utmost of his clear voice.

Then followed a portion of Scripture and a prayer, the doors opened, and in streamed many children, who all knew where to go. Mr. Snowls said—

'Before dismissing the classes, I beg to remind you there will be short teaching, as we shall have to practise the Hanny-versary 'ymns.'

The infants dropped off their seats, or were pulled down by one another, and struggled out into the aisle a mass of tiny men and women, pushing and contending for pre-eminence, and finally issued through a door at the end of the aisle. One or two of the senior classes

removed to the gallery. The Bible Class of young men marched along the aisle, bobbing up and down behind a little elderly man, and disappeared through the door on the other side of the pulpit, which led to the vestry.

When these changes and departures had taken place, comparative order was restored to the remaining assembly, after the superintendent had done a good deal of shouting, 'Silence! order there! can't you boys be quiet!' He generally concluded these appeals with the brief couplet, uttered in a somewhat nasal twang—

'Less noise,
You boys.'

The class in which Dibs was settled down to something like attention to Mr. Jarman and the teaching.

The boys crowded round Mr. Jarman, who handed a few Bibles to those who could read, asking Dibs if he could.

'I can read if it's heasy and big print,' replied the boy.

'Well, we'll soon see if you can manage a verse,' said the teacher, who continued—

'Our lesson this afternoon is on "*He Careth.*" Now can any of you tell me who is spoken of in that short text?'—as he looked round, with a kindly smile, on the boys' faces.

There was a pause, then one boy said confidently, 'Moses.'

'No,' responded Mr. Jarman, unmoved by the observa-

tion. 'It's not Moses this afternoon, though Moses did care for the people.'

'It was Moses last Sunday afternoon,' put in another boy, as if to excuse this mistake.

'Yes, it was. I am glad you can remember it; perhaps you may know better when I say the whole text, "Casting all your care on Him, for He careth." Now then, to whom do the words refer?'

'I know, teacher. Daniel.'

One or two other authors or favourite heroes were mentioned. Mr. Jarman said—

'The words were spoken by Peter, and they refer to God; if all of you do not know who Peter was, you all know about God.' Then, after a pause, looking round the class and fixing his eyes on the new boy, he said in an encouraging tone, 'Now can *you* tell me what God does for us?'

'Damns us, sir.'

For a moment Mr. Jarman was shocked and staggered, so that he hardly knew what to say, but collected himself enough to ask—

'How do you know that?'

'Because people down our court say so one time or another.'

'That is,' said Mr. Jarman, greatly disconcerted at the prompt reply, 'when they swear and use God's name in vain. Is that all you know of God? It's very sad!'

Dibs made no answer.

'Don't you know God made us, loves us, *cares* for us, as this verse says?' continued the teacher.

'How do you know that?' inquired Dibs, in a tone that seemed to imply one assertion was as good as another.

'Because God made all things—they did not come of theirselves. Because I have felt God loves us, and the Bible says He *cares* for us.'

'Did God make Silly Billy? If He did, I shouldn't think He cares much about 'im.'

'You mustn't speak like that. I am afraid you are trifling.'

'No, I ain't. Silly Billy is a real chap in our court, only he ain't all there; he's a tile short, ain't he, Crop? Crop knows 'im.'

'Yes; God cares for him.'

'Then, why didn't God give him more wits? He can't take care of 'isself,' interjected the boy.

'I can't tell,' said Mr. Jarman. 'Perhaps it was that some of you boys might take the more care of him, poor fellow, and so make it up to him in other ways.'

Dibs felt pleased Mr. Jarman had said he could not tell; he was glad he had put a poser, as he thought, and unconsciously felt drawn to an honest man who did not say what he did not know, although he felt the reproof about taking care of poor Silly Billy.

Mr. Jarman proceeded with his lesson, which was in Luke xii., about the five sparrows being sold for two farthings. The market price of the birds very deeply

interested the audience. Dibs fairly longed to speculate, and with real earnestness said—

'They must have catched 'em easy, to sell 'em at that price; there must have been a —— lot of 'em.'

Poor Dibs! in this remark he quite forgot himself, and used a very bad word, that made the boys laugh at hearing it being employed in Sunday-school.

Mr. Jarman turned sharply to Dibs, and said: 'I was afraid you were a low, ignorant boy, and must be pitied and cared for, or I would turn you out of the class before all the school; there isn't another lad in the Sunday-school who would not be ashamed of himself for using a word like that here. But it's very little worse to say it in here than outside, because God cares about us in the streets on week-days, as well as in the school on Sunday.'

'I won't say that 'ere word again to you; it kind of slipped out,' said the boy, not much abashed; 'but,' he added, 'it ain't my fault if I ben't a scholard, though I guess I could put you up to a thing or two.'

Mr. Jarman said, good-humouredly, 'I dare say you could; and I hope I'll be able to teach you something if you come regularly to school.'

After speaking of the London sparrows, and saying what nice little brave birds they were to stay with us all the winter through, while other birds went to warmer countries, these plucky little chaps were home birds,

that chirped away through all the fog and snow, and how they were cared for in the hard frost and bitter cold, he dwelt on the words, 'Are ye not of more value than many sparrows?'

'God don't care for hungry boys as He does for the tofts at the West End, or else He would give 'em more grub?' inquired Dibs.

'Oh yes, He do,' said Mr. Jarman. 'It's like this: suppose you had a little baby brother as was crippled, and another bigger brother as was getting good money, and could take care of hisself, whom would you care for first?'

'Why, the little 'un; and if I had any victuals, I should let 'im have a bite,' said Dibs.

'Teacher,' asked another boy, 'why are people ever hungry if God cares for 'em?'

Mr. Jarman knew the boy and his wretched home, where the money that should have clothed and fed the children went to the public-house, and as he looked at the pinched face the tears were in his eyes as he said: 'There are many reasons; most on 'em I don't know. I often thinks about it. It's to teach people something they can't learn any other way. Jesus was hungry, but God cared for Him. So I know God loves the hungry. Are ye not of more value than many sparrows? Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.'

'Who counts 'em, teacher?' asked Dibs, in great astonishment.

'God does,' replied Mr. Jarman.

'He wouldn't have quite such a job with yours, as you are very nigh bald; but my word, it must take a time to count some chaps,' pursued Dibs.

The lesson was continued after this very smoothly, and most of the boys were interested, until the bell rang for the first time, and preparation was being made for closing the class; then Crop ventured to say, 'Dibs wanted to know about them crowns you was a-telling us about the other Sunday, teacher.'

'All right,' said Mr. Jarman; 'I shall be pleased to tell him all I know; but we are going to practise the hymns now, so we'll leave it for another time if your friend will come again.'

The second bell sounded, and the other classes came back to their places. A general disorder continued for some minutes. After one or two efforts on the part of the superintendent, comparative silence was restored when he shouted out—

'Mr. Tubbs will hindeavour to instruct in the new hymns.'

Mr. Tubbs advanced to the table-pew and spoke in a whisper to the young lady who was said to 'manage the harmonium,' then cleared his voice and said, 'Now, boys and girls, I want to learn you a new hymn and a new tune. We'll take one verse, and keep on a-singing that until we know the tune.'

The children were not long picking up both the

words and the lovely tune 'Everton,' by Henry Smart; the oft-repeated verse ran thus :—

'Jesus came, the heavens adoring,
Came with peace from realms on high;
Jesus came for man's redemption,
Lowly came on earth to die.
Hallelujah!
Came in deep humility.'

Dibs was delighted with the singing; he caught the words and melody at once, and sang away in a clear strong voice that was soon noticed by Mr. Tubbs above all the rest. When the practice was over, while Mr. Snowls was dismissing the classes, the leader of the singing came up to ask Mr. Jarman which of his boys sang so well at the close of school. The teacher pointed Dibs out, who felt greatly flattered by this notice. Mr. Tubbs eyed Dibs with caution, and said, 'We must have you in the choir, if you think you can behave yourself.'

Dibs did not like the condition, and said nothing, but when school was over went home singing, 'Jesus came, the heavens adoring.'

CHAPTER III.

SILLY BILLY.

'Not only was Thebes built by the music of an Orpheus; but without the music of some inspired Orpheus was no city ever built, no work that man glories in ever done.'—*Carlyle.*

DIBS went home from school to remember very little about the lesson; but the tune and words of the hymn were engraved upon his mind, never to be forgotten. He had no pleasant sense of having done a pious duty by going to Sunday-school. The motive which induced his attendance was the same that made him go to see any sight or attend any amusement, 'to pass time,' as he sometimes said, or to see something fresh.

In the course of the evening he met with a little gang of his usual companions to play or run the streets, and annoy one or two policemen who were their special objects of enmity. Going to Sunday-school from the point of view of this group was held to be purely a matter of taste, whether the treats offered were thought to be sufficient compensation for having to be still and behave respectably. Denominational preference was of

no consideration. The relative value of the pleasurable inducements of attending Sunday-school were weighed and discussed solely on a business basis; was it worth while to put in so many attendances to secure the offered privileges, or was it not? Only one other matter had any vital connection with this way of spending Sunday afternoon, and that was the personal influence of the teacher in whose class they were. If the teacher was liked or disliked, that settled the question, and personal attachment to individual teachers in poor schools weighed successfully against the fleshpot of luxury that more wealthy schools might offer.

It was a damp, wet, cold, drizzling Sunday evening, the streets were empty of the usual noisy traffic, but the pavements were filled with streams of people. In the main thoroughfares the loafers at the corners and near the public-houses mingled with the ill-clothed and well-dressed, who were passing and repassing. Pharisees and sinners, hypocrites and saints, came into close proximity, many of whom were on their way to places of worship. Most of the passengers on the highways seemed happy and self-absorbed. The aching hearts and wounded spirits are only known to One. We only see the form; the Father sees the life: only He who loves all can know us all and altogether. While the current of women and men ebbed and flowed, Dibs and one or two of his choicest friends, whose sole delight was rough mischief, pushed their way out of the

court into the open street, with no particular object in view, except that of enjoying themselves, if possible.

The conversation was not long sustained on any subject, and was much broken by the fact that Dibs had found a partially burnt cigar that had been thrown away, but having successfully lit the stump and cocked his hat, he was swelling and spreading himself out, to the general admiration of his friends, who were exhorting him to let them have a pull by turns. Dibs being generous by nature, graciously granted the request, and each boy was urged to distinguish himself by puffing the smoke out through his nose, a performance that only Crop could accomplish. As they proceeded, one of the boys asked Dibs what he had done with himself in the afternoon.

To which he replied, 'I went to school along with Crop.'

'Did you like it?' asked his friend.

'I didn't mind it; there's nothing bad about it except

that you have to bide still, and none of 'em hollers out but the boss with a bell.'

'Shall you go again?' was the inquiry.

'I shouldn't wonder; there's lots of singing, it ain't up to the gaf, there's no toe-and-heel business in the chorus, but it costs nothink.'

'The chap as leads the singing comed down to speak to our teacher, and said sum'ut about a hoisting Dibs up into the choir, because of his singing,' put in Crop, as an important feature redounding to the glory of their companion.

'Will they give yer anythink if you do go?' asked a knowing young urchin who rejoiced in the name of Nehemiah Motes.

'Not they,' said Crop decidedly. This assertion settled the matter, as Crop was considered an authority on the matters of Bethesda Chapel because he had attended school there some time. The real reason of Crop's fidelity to the place was the kindness Mr. Jarman had shown him when he came out of prison. He went to meet him the very day he was released, to shake hands with him and say a kind word, asked him home to tea the Sunday after, and helped him to get a job or two in the Surrey Commercial Docks. But no one would have thought there was any hidden tie of honour and fidelity that attached Crop to the class. Nehemiah Motes was, in his way, an admirer of Dibs, and remarked generally after Crop's last word—

'There ain't many boys 'is size who can fight and sing as well as Dibs.'

At this moment, while the boys were wandering about with no particular aim in the damp drizzly evening, no proposal had given enough satisfaction for it to be generally adopted, and they had almost strolled round again to the starting-place, when Silly Billy came in sight.

Having nothing to do, they were just ready for any mischief that might turn up. Hence the approach of the poor half-witted young man was hailed with delight.

One boy shouted, 'Here comes Silly Billy! Let's have a game with him!'

The harmless idiot came slowly on with his shambling gait, muttering and talking to himself. He was tall and thin, with a weak, helpless, hungry look, and always wretchedly clothed—a picture of hopeless human misery. He lived with his mother; he had been in the workhouse, but being very troublesome there and quite harmless, and even happy when allowed to wander about at liberty, he came to live again with his mother after she came out of the hospital. He could plait straw and sew sacks; but neither of these industries, nor both together, did much to help to pay the rent and keep body and soul together. It was a very hard struggle for the mother, who was a waistcoat-maker by trade; but the prices were so low and work so difficult to obtain, that they only kept themselves just above starving-point.

When Dibs saw by the light of the gas the well-known form approaching along the wet pavement, he felt for the first time a kind of pity for the unfortunate man. Whether it was the unconscious influence of the words 'He careth,' or the feeling that it was cowardly to ill-use one so helpless, Dibs suddenly made up his mind he wouldn't wrong Silly Billy. It had always seemed legitimate hitherto, first, because all the boys did it as a diversion without meaning any harm, and secondly, because Silly Billy being a man he ought to be able to look out for himself, and they were not to blame if he did not protect himself. Dibs had formerly taken part in teasing poor Silly Billy, not from any intentional cruelty, but from thoughtlessly doing what others did, half imagining that he didn't feel like other human beings because he was half-witted.

Perhaps it was because all the rest of the boys made a sudden dash at Billy, that he seemed to perceive all at once it wasn't fair that so many should set on him just for their own sport. The poor half-witted fellow had a very rough time of it, often being hurt until he cried. Sometimes the boys would run pins into him, calling him 'cry baby.' Now the lads rushed round him, pulling his coat and hair, pinching his arms and legs, with occasional pats on the head of more or less severity. All the poor baited and tormented victim could do was to keep turning round and round, saying, without making the least effort to escape or protect

himself, 'I'll tell your mother.' At which the boys would peal forth shouts of laughter.

There was one big boy more cruel and brutal than the rest, who came up in a defiant attitude, squared in front of the poor fellow and said, 'If you tell my mother I'll thrash you.'

'Yes, I'll tell your mother, and mine too,' was the simple reply.

'Very well,' said the assumed pugilist, 'we'll fight it out.'

'Come on! fight it out! I'll back yer!' roared some of the boys.

One or two pushed the idiot toward the combatant, who with foul language and hideous taunts hit him several times, but Silly Billy only said, 'I shall tell your mother.'

'Say it again, and I'll smash into you.'

The words were hardly repeated when his cruel foe struck the jabbering, terrified victim full in the face with his open hand, till he cried out with pain.

Up to this point Dibs had been a passive on-looker, quite content with the virtue of non-interference, feeling tempted to join in the game of baiting Silly Billy. But the fact that he stood aside from the cruel sport made him for an instant view the scene from another stand-point, and suddenly there came the feeling of passionate resentment at the unfairness and injustice before him.

The cry of pain roused the indignation of Dibs, he walked straight up to the big hulking bully, and smacked him full in the face, exactly as he had done Silly Billy, so that the fellow reeled back tingling again. Dibs administered this reproof with many words of abuse. The moment the big bully recovered from his surprise, he flew at Dibs with a torrent of bad language, and in a moment the two were pitching in with might and main Dibs was quite prepared for this attack, and bravely set himself to business ; but it was quite certain, though far more skilful and active, he was no match for this opponent, nearly twice his size, weight, and strength. Dibs could defend himself with quite masterly ability ; but the light was bad, he could not see his opponent, it was just a scramble at close quarters for giving blows. Dibs had planted one or two stinging hits in the face of his assailant ; but if it came to endurance, Dibs was bound to get the worst of it.

The temper and rage of the cuffing, struggling combatants waxed hot, cheered by the boys, who goaded them on with brutal words and oaths. In the strife there was a moment's pause ; then Dibs rushed at his assailant, closed so quickly, and succeeded in hammering away with such rapidity with his sharp knuckles, that the hulking bully could neither defend nor attack.

Shouts rose on all sides of Dibs—

'Go it, Dibs !'

'Give it him !'

'You'll whack him now!'

And sure enough Dibs was getting the best of it; he redoubled his exertion, drew himself together for one blow full in the face; but at that instant his cowardly antagonist met him with a dig in the stomach that took his wind, and down went poor Dibs as one dead. For some seconds he was so bad his friends thought it was all over with him; at length they lifted him up and propped him against the iron rails in front of some houses under a lamp-post. Several bystanders had gathered, although the affair had only lasted a few minutes, and now a small crowd closed round.

The moment he could stand, he turned away from the crowd, and leaned against the rail, his face over his arm, crying with pain and rage.

His first words were, 'I'll do for him yet! Where is he?'

The form of a retreating figure was being pointed at by Silly Billy, who was silently spitting toward the direction in which the rock of offence was rapidly vanishing.

At this moment a neighbouring minister returning from his Sunday evening duty pushed his way through the little knot of boys and men, inquiring what was the matter.

Some one said, 'A boy's hurt.'

'How did he get hurt? Where are you hurt, my boy?' inquired the parson.

'They was only a fi'ting; do 'em good,' said a man.

'He was a-taking Silly Billy's part, and a-thrashing Bully Brag, twice his size, and nearly whacked him too, when Brag 'it him in his stomic and took 'is wind, and he was nearly killed, 'cause he 'adn't got no breath,' said Motes.

The minister saw poor Dibs could hardly stand; he looked white, though his face was smeared with blood and mud, and was trembling in every limb. He put his hand tenderly on his shoulder, and said—

'This fighting is always a bad business, at home or abroad, and leaves some hurt and injury behind it everywhere. I see you are in great pain.'

'I am better now,' said Dibs, trying to go off in the direction his foe had taken, but he could only stagger along by the railing.

'Where do you live?'

Dibs didn't say anything in reply to this remark from the parson.

'Does any one know where the lad lives? He is not able to walk alone.'

'Down Chucker's Entry; but he won't go home till he's finished 'is job with Brag,' said Motes.

'Well, then, I shall have to see you home, my lad; there can be no more fighting now.'

'He's beaten Bully Brag anyhow; now he's lick'd because he hit 'im in the wind, isn't he?' inquired Motes from the authority of the cloth.

'If he hit him below the belt, I believe he is disgraced in the rules of the ring. It was a very cowardly thing to do.'

'Do you hear, Dibs? Parson says you 'ave beat him!' said Motes in excitement.

Crop had been supporting Dibs and comforting him as best he could, but took no interest in the parson, or the crowd that was dispersing as Crop assisted Dibs to move on.

'Will you see the lad safely home?' said the minister to Crop.

'Of course. I shan't leave 'im till he's all right,' was the curt reply.

'Well, my boy, let this be a lesson to you through life,' began the minister, 'and never be tempted again to —to'—here he felt in his pocket, and said in kinder tones, 'I fear you look as if a good meal would be the best cure for you. I am sorry I haven't more to help you with,' as he put twopence in his hand; 'and perhaps I'll come and see you.'

The minister was just moving off, saying, 'Good night, boys,' when Motes, observing the gift of coppers, spread himself full in front of the clerical friend, without hat or shoes, with his legs wide apart, and, projecting his body forward and head back, touching his forehead with his finger as a sign of respect, he said loudly and rapidly, in pleading tones—

'Oh-please-sir-you-may-'it-me-in-the-wind-or-anywhere-all-over-my-body-for-a-penny.'

With a suppressed smile the wearer of the white tie passed on, leaving the dissolving group of boys. Crop slowly led Dibs toward his desolate home.

But as he went he began to recover himself a little, and it was not long before he found breath enough to whistle his now favourite tune—

'Jesus came, the heavens adoring,
Came in deep humility.'

CHAPTER IV.

PROMOTED TO THE CHOIR.

God speaks to us in bird and song,
In winds that drift the clouds along,
Above the din of sin and wrong,
A melody of love.'

DIBS recovered from his wounds and bruises. The next Sunday he went to Sunday-school again.

Mr. Jarman was evidently pleased at his appearance, and the welcome he received made an unconscious impression on Dibs' mind, for there were not many places where, after he had once put in a personal call, his presence seemed much desired a second time.

Nothing was said about the late conflict, though Dibs knew well that his reputation had not suffered by his last engagement; in fact, an increased respect was shown him by his friends, and Silly Billy had enjoyed a freedom from abuse that he had not known for a long time. Since Dibs' defence there had been a general change in the treatment shown him, for when the popular candidate shows consideration for the poor and despised, even they become persons of some importance, in whatever sphere of life they live.

The introductory part of the school was gone through, with many calls for 'Order!' and 'Silence!' The lesson for the day was not less interesting than before, the subject being Zacchæus. The reading of the Bible verses was dragged through, with a few verbal explanations. Then the picture was plainly set before the boys by Mr. Jarman, the striking feature of which was the little man climbing the tree to see Jesus go by. This fairly riveted the attention of Dibs. He felt the most profound sympathy with this incident. The story had not developed far before Dibs anxiously inquired: 'But, teacher, how was it the bobbies were not after the chap as climbed the tree?'

'Because there were none then,' replied Mr. Jarman.

When this state of social liberty fairly dawned on Dibs' mind, the lesson was nearly wrecked by questions concerning the exact locality where this town was situated.

A large demand was made for further details and more exact information concerning the stature and age of the climber, and the nature and height of the tree. But Mr. Jarman was always ready on these occasions, for he delighted to see the boys interested, and knew by homely experience how to transfer the ancient story to modern understanding, and then to lead back the crude imaginations of his hearers to the central facts of his subject.

Dibs felt the greatest interest in the lesson; it all

made a most real and indelible impression on his mind; the whole incident was so much like his own effort to see the Queen, that every feature received a special charm. The press of people, the running on before, the climbing up into the tree, the waiting for Jesus, His coming, the looking up into the branches, the unexpected honour, the joyful coming down with haste, all grew up in the mind's eye of the boy with this certainty of conviction that there was good news about the story, and Dibs wished with all his soul that it all might happen over again, and he be the lucky one next time.

When the teaching closed, Dibs said—

'Tell us again the name of the little chap as climbed that tree, teacher.'

'Zacchæus,' replied Mr. Jarman.

'I wish it was a heasier one to remember,' said Dibs; 'and when, teacher, are you going to tell us about them crowns?'

'Well, next Sunday, perhaps,' responded Mr. Jarman.

Almost immediately the bell was rung to close school for the singing practice to begin.

The scholars assembled according to the usual custom, but order could not be got for some time. The superintendent rang the bell again and again, and called for silence till he was nearly hoarse. Mr. Tubbs was impatiently waiting to begin. Both officers were looking round for an individual to pitch on to make an example

of, but when all the school was talking, to single out one was not a wise or easy task. Presently Mr. Snowls fixed his eyes in the direction of Mr. Jarman's class, and said in his loudest voice—

'I see some one talking in the Fourth Boys' class;' then followed a slight pause.

'I see that boy laughing now; he's a new boy—I don't know his name; let him stand up.' Another pause.

'Mr. Jarman, the boy does not seem to know when he's spoken to. Come,' said Mr. Snowls in a more coaxing tone, 'come, my lad, stand up when I tell you.' Mr. Jarman said something to Dibs, and he stood bolt upright, with a broad grin on his face, but no sense of bashfulness or shame.

'That's right, my lad; always do what you are told, and remember to be silent in school; you are here to learn, *not* to make a noise. Now, my lad, you may sit down, but don't forget to hold your tongue.' Dibs opened his mouth as wide as he could, and dropped out the red member as far as it would go, and held the tip between his finger and thumb, and instantly sat down, to the great amusement of the class—a titter running round the school.

Mr. Snowls pretended not to see, and said, addressing the other side of the chapel especially, 'When I speak to a boy or girl for trifling in God's House, it isn't anything to laugh at.'

With this Mr. Tubbs announced the hymn—

'Summer suns are glowing over land and sea.'

The first verse was tried once or twice, but the children did not seem to pick it up. In a little time Mr. Tubbs said with impatience—

'This will never do. Some of the boys are playing; some of the girls are talking; others are looking to see if Mary or Sarah Ann hasn't got a new bonnet on; several of the infants are asleep, and two, I am sorry to see, are fighting.'

Every eye passed a look to the pews occupied by the infants, just in front of the table-pew; but as the combatants were hardly higher than the seats in the pew, the conflict could not be seen, except by one or two boys, who stood up on the seats to gain a glimpse of the battle. A thud of something soft bumping the floor, and a cry and scuffle, announced the fact that the struggle was being continued under the seats. Mr. Tubbs and the infant-class teacher dived into the pew, and rescued the warriors from their unhallowed engagement. Then there appeared two fat and dirty urchins, red in the face and angry, both sticky with lollipops, and weeping; one with a cheek largely protruding from a

giant specimen of a 'bull's-eye,' which the other had vainly sought to extricate, but holding in one hand the two remaining treasures wrapped in a piece of old newspaper.

The superintendent rose to rebuke the rising tide of general noise and disturbance. 'Horder! Horder, you boys! Them hinfants had better be dismissed.'

The bell was rung. With the joint assistance of Mr. Tubbs, the secretary, and the teacher, the troop of tiny scholars swarmed towards the door. The secretary was not an unkind man, and popular with the infants; whenever he went into the class-room he had just a word for them; a smile and nod for each, wherever he met them. He could play with them, but could not teach them. He tried one day; but he had no control over them. At last he threatened to put one of the most troublesome into the corner, and when he carried out his threat, the whole class were so pleased, thinking it was a new game of play, they shouted: 'Me next, teacher.' 'When will it be my turn?' To-day, as the little crowd struggled down the aisle, and slowly passed out of the chapel lobby, one infant caught him affectionately by the trouser-leg, so he stooped down and said: 'Aye, what is it?'

'Oh, Mr. Lobson! our cat laid two little kittens this morning.'

'I am glad to hear it, and hope they are doing nicely, responded the secretary as he adjusted the infant's hat.

When they had all departed, or been consigned to the care of elder brothers or sisters in other classes, the superintendent said: 'We will take to the practice hunder Mr. Tubbses leading, and I hope there will be better horder.'

Mr. Tubbs resumed his place in the table-pew, and then requested all those in the Sunday-school who came to his singing-class, and the members of the choir, to come to the front, and sit in the seats that the infants had just left.

While this suggestion was being carried out, he looked towards Mr. Jarman's class, and said: 'There's a new boy in your class that seems to have a good voice, will he come forward here?'

Dibs did not know whether he were meant or not; but Mr. Jarman said: 'Mr. Tubbs is speaking to you; go and tell him you cannot read much.'

The boy immediately obeyed, and stamped down the aisle to the table-pew, and said to Mr. Tubbs: 'Please, sir, I can't read much.'

'Well, do the best you can; sit there,' rejoined Mr. Tubbs, pointing to the first pew.

Dibs obeyed, and felt a little uncomfortable in so conspicuous a position by himself; but on looking round, and receiving a friendly wink and grimace of approval from Crop, the feeling vanished, especially when the other singers filled up the seats.

Without more delay, the practice went off briskly;

one or two more hymns were taken. Dibs was filled with regret that he could not read better, as he could not pick out the words fast enough to sing them well; but if a verse were tried over once or twice he was able to manage it. However, Dibs' face quite brightened up when the conductor gave out, 'The hymn we took last Sunday—"Jesus came, the heavens adoring." Now, don't drag; keep the time up.'

The melody was played over, and the voices started. Dibs remembered the words, and poured his whole soul into the music; his clear voice rose like a lark singing over green meadows beneath a fickle April sky.

Mr. Tubbs was very pleased. There was no mistake, the boy could sing; it was as natural to him as to the birds. Mr. Tubbs' approval was quite evident; he looked at the young lady who managed the instrument, and nodded towards the unconscious boy who was filling the dingy chapel with sweetest strains, as much as to say, 'Now, that's the style.'

He tapped the instrument, asked for the key-note, and said, 'We will take the first verse again without the harmonium.'

The note was given. 'I'll beat a bar, and then all together.' Dibs watched the little stick as if it might have been a magic wand; and then when the silent bar was over, the boy responded to the downward beat with instantaneous precision, and lead the whole school as if he were the chief soprano, and had been accustomed to

the work for years; but he was in happy ignorance that he had in any way distinguished himself.

Before the school was dismissed, Mr. Tubbs asked all the singers to stay behind for a little extra practice. There were many black looks in response to this request, but Dibs was as pleased as if some special favour had been wrought for his benefit. If he had been invited to stay for the rest of the day to sing, he would have been entirely satisfied.

The classes went out in order, and Mr. Jarman and his boys left, pitying poor Dibs, who was being kept in for no fault of his. The teacher feared a little that the result might be he would never see his new pupil again. But no one knew the pure delight it was to this fearless, restless, lively lad to sing, till he forgot his wet feet and damp clothes, the wretched home, and dry-bread dinner, the hunger and the cold, to sing, until all else passed away, and he was lost in simple enjoyment of the sweet sounds that seemed to lead his thoughts far away above the roof beyond the dirt and smoke, up through the dark, dull clouds, into the clearest, brightest light, where out of the bowed heavens there stood a silent, solitary, radiant figure, lonely in love and meekness, and ever the brief refrain was ringing, 'Comes in deep humility.'

When the second and special practice was over, which was all too short for Dibs, Mr. Tubbs told him to stay for a minute, as a general rush was made for the door

by all, excepting Mr. Snowls, junior, who kept the key of the harmonium on the same bunch with the library key. He was a long time locking up the instrument, and the young lady who managed it a long time putting on her gloves. Dibs, however, observed none of these things, being engrossed in the following conversation :—

Mr. Tubbs opened the interview with the observation, 'I suppose you never learned to sing?'

'No, sir,' with evident astonishment. 'I never learnt nothink, all I knows I picked up.'

'It's a pity you can't read better; do you go to school?'

Dibs looked a little down, and said, 'I have been, but I don't go if I can help it.'

'The School Board man will be looking after you.'

'He do, but I can manage to give him the slip.'

'He'll be after your father and mother.'

'I ain't got no mother, and he'll have a job to find father, for he's away all day.'

'What does your father do?'

'Earns his living,' was the ready reply.

'Where does he work?'

'A long ways from here,' said Dibs, with a merry twinkle.

It was evident Mr. Tubbs was not going to get much private information concerning Dibs' domestic history, so he remarked in a matter-of-fact way—

'You've got a good voice; I think I might do some-

thing with it ;' he continued, in a more encouraging tone, 'wouldn't you like to improve in singing ?'

'I don't mind,' said Dibs, in an equally matter-of-fact way.

'I thought it would be nice for you to come into the choir, and assist in the worship of God, and help with the Psalmody.'

'And help with the what ?'

'With the Psalmody.'

'I don't know he,' said Dibs with impertinent humour.

'I mean our hymns and service of praise ; but if you do come into the choir you must behave yourself ; we can have no cheek from ignorant boys like you.'

'All right, boss, then I'll hook it,' said Dibs, making a movement to depart.

'You needn't go ; I was only warning you ; now I think you had better come to the practice on Friday evening here at 8 o'clock, and see how you get on and like it ; then if you do well, and try to be a good lad you'll be promoted to the choir. In the meantime do your best to get on in the reading, go to day school, and if you only persevere, by-and-bye you may be a very respectable boy and do well.'

Poor Dibs ! he had no ambition to be respectable, did not want to be in the choir, having very little idea of what it meant, seldom if ever went to any place of worship, felt no interest in church or chapel, and did not much care for the prospect ahead that Mr. Tubbs sug-

gested as a reward of virtue. He looked up, and seeing that the librarian and harmoniumist had gone, thought it time to be off, and moved toward the door, when Mr. Tubbs held out his hand, and said more pleasantly—

'Well, I shall expect you Friday; you'll come for the singing practice, won't you?'

'Yes,' said Dibs, very awkwardly shaking hands, as if he thought it a very unnecessary ceremony which he hardly knew how to accomplish. While walking down the aisle, Mr. Tubbs said—

'Let's see, what is your name?'

'Dibs.'

'What's your other name?'

'Everybody calls me Dibs, that's enough; what do you want another name for, you ain't a bobby in private clothes, be yer?' With this observation the boy darted out at the door, leaving Mr. Tubbs wondering what kind of an acquisition he was going to introduce into the choir, although he felt sure that there was a successful future for the boy's voice.

Dibs fled with all speed to seek some of his companions to tell them of the interview, and his prospects about the choir. On the way he met Silly Billy, who immediately laughed and nodded, muttered to himself, and smiled, nodding again and again as he recognised his friend.

'How do, how do?' said the poor fellow.

'All right, Billy, just got out of prison; how's yerself?'

'Nay,' said the demented one, with a cunning look, 'it's skule, I saw you.'

'Did you, now? One's nearly as bad as t'other, only if you goes to prison yer'll get school too.'

'I used to go to skule till they turned me out; may I go along o' you?'

'We'll try it on next Sunday; it'll be a lark;' and with that Dibs caught sight of Crop, and off he bounded, leaving Silly Billy smiling and muttering.

CHAPTER V.

MANY CROWNS.

'Go forth, for thou shalt see what I have seen,
And weak through all, till one will crown thee king,
Far in the spiritual city.'—*Tennyson.*

DIBS went to the week evening practice, in spite of some chaff which his friends raised about his new respectable connection with folks that sang regularly at a place of worship. His companions warned him if he went too often they might make 'a good boy' of him, and then it would be all up with him for any more mud-larks at low tide on the river, and street tricks dodging the bobbies. They told him if he went too often to chapel the folks would sew all his brace buttons on for him, and perhaps put him into a pot-hat, and he would never smoke and play pitch-and-toss, and he would have to give up swearing, and then he might become too proud to know his old chums.

However, Dibs left his companions for the singing practice with such a torrent of bad language that they must have been fully convinced he was not going to the good all at once. He parted from them with the

full determination he would fight and swear and carry on with the worst, so as to maintain his position and reputation among his comrades, even though he might go to chapel Sundays and week-days.

The practice went off well. Dibs' whole soul went forth in song. There was no temptation to be very troublesome, no one upset him, all seemed kind. Mr. Tubbs was quite agreeable, and asked the boy to sing one line through by himself, which Dibs accomplished as perfectly as a trained professional, but as naturally as a bird. Several of the choir looked at one another in surprise.

'I shall make a first-rate singer of you, my boy,' said Mr. Tubbs, nodding his head emphatically. The young man who carried the keys and sang bass looked at the young lady who 'managed the instrument,' and as she played from ear rather than from note and faced the singers, she could of course return the look with approval, so she dropped her eyelids and smiled. Dibs took little notice of any one, but thoroughly enjoyed the singing, and was sorry when it was over.

At the conclusion Mr. Tubbs was in good spirits, said they had had a good time that evening, and shook hands with all going out. When it came to Dibs' turn, he said: 'If you like to come half-an-hour before the others another evening I will give you a lesson; I should like you to read the tonic system. I know you will pick it up very soon.'

Dibs promised he would and went away, resolving in his heart he would get on with his reading, and try to do his very best with the singing, and be more of a dare-devil than ever, so that none of his friends should have any cause to find he was growing 'good.'

The next Sunday Dibs went to school, and was there in ample time, that he might be enabled to enjoy what sport was going, before the arrival of authority strong enough to control the early comers. The moment Mr. Jarman appeared, Dibs said: 'Are yer going to tell us about them crowns?'

'Yes,' said Mr. Jarman; 'and if you are good I 'ave got some pictures about crowns I'll show you.'

Every lad who entered the class was immediately informed by Dibs in a confidential whisper: 'He's agoing to tell us about them crowns, and he's got some picters he'll show 's if yer 'olds yer noise and sits straight.'

Whereupon Dibs would hem or cough, and then assume a stiffened attitude of speechless gravity. If Mr. Jarman looked at him he would relax into his ordinary manner, or if he seemed to catch Mr. Jarman's eyes when in a state of nature he would resume the rigid position, as if suddenly transfixed into the model of a graven image that was intended to represent virtue. When Mr. Jarman removed his glance he would slowly contort his face into horrible grimaces, but otherwise he would remain silent and motionless. The boys were

deeply interested in Dibs' conduct, and when, during the prayer, Mr. Jarman rose reverently, and covered over his eyes with his hand as he leaned over the pew door—generally an occasion of great temptation—while the devotional exercises lasted, Dibs held the class spellbound by the facial changes he was able to produce, until the suppressed laughter of one boy threatened to convulse the rest. Then Dibs, turning round, adopted an attitude precisely similar to his teacher, overlooking the pew-back that faced another class. When the Amen was said, Dibs remained gravely standing for some seconds, as if still lost in prayer, and resumed his seat with the unconscious appearance of being a good and well-behaved boy.

After the introductory part of school was over, and the classes were being dismissed to their places, a slight disturbance was caused at the farthest end of the chapel by the entrance of Silly Billy, who had come inside the door, and was looking round for Dibs. He was a well-known figure to many of the children, and several began to titter when they saw him peering about and slowly making his way down the aisle.

The secretary, observing this, hastened to him, and said—

'What is it you want? Come, this is no place for you!'

'I want to come to skule; Dibs said I might,' replied the idiot with a vacant look.

'What do you want with Sunday-school?' said the secretary, making a sign toward the door.

'I want to learn of Jesus,' stammered the poor fellow.

'We have no class we can put you in,' rejoined the man in authority.

'I think I'm about fit for the infant class.'

'No, no, you're too big a fool for the infants.'

'Well, you'll let me stay in th' chap-hill, as Dibs is my friend, and it's warm in here,' said the muttering, shivering man.

'Nay, nay, you'll upset all the school. See how they are staring at you now. Come, move off!'

Then the idiot slowly began his retreat, murmuring, 'I shall tell mother. Dibs is my friend, I shall wait for him. He'll let me in.' Then, as he got to the door, he raised his voice, as if he might be preaching, or appealing to faces no one saw but himself, and declaimed with almost thrilling earnestness: 'Some

day I shall sit at Jesus' feet clothed and in my right mind. Shall you?'

All in school heard those words, and when Dibs looked at Mr. Jarman, he was evidently wiping his eyes. Dibs felt he had been asked a question he did not know how to answer, and wondered in his mind what the secretary thought of it.

When order was restored the class quietly settled down to hear about the crowns. Mr. Jarman told the boys the word crown meant top or roundness, so the dictionary said. In ancient times, when boys and men let their hair grow long, and did not trouble about it being cut, and kept short, as is the fashion nowadays with the swells—

'And with chaps like Crop,' interjected Dibs.

So in order to keep it tidy, and from falling about their face, people used to wear a band or fillet that bound the hair smoothly round the head. In time this became more ornamental, sometimes being made of ivory, metal, silver, or even gold. Then, it being one of the most conspicuous and constantly-used articles of apparel on special occasions, chiefs and people of distinction would put on very costly ones. So the fillet became more and more a marked feature, and certain ones became signs of honour, only to be worn by those held in high esteem. Hence it became associated with those of noble and kingly life. Thus the idea of a crown, as we think of it, was gradually developed until it

became identified with the throne and sceptre, and is the symbol of ruling power and pre-eminent authority. Among the earliest evidences of the existence of a king we find the crown; in the most ancient Egyptian period the rulers of men wore crowns.

The simplest meaning of the crown is that some one is noble in character or superior in power. It meant force rightly used; strength that men could honour. It indicated *one* worthy of esteem, and *many* able to see and appreciate the valour and worth of the one. At first, the crown-wearer was one chosen—one selected because of merit. After a time the good or great man, chief of the community, would appoint his son to succeed him, and with this the idea of hereditary kingship and crown-wearing became established.

Among the heathen of all time, so far as Mr. Jarman knew, he said no gods were represented with crowns; they might judge them and dispense them, but they were always above them. With the Greeks the crown played a memorable part in the national history, being the reward of struggle and victory in all contests and trials of strength. Then Mr. Jarman told them tales of the Grecian games of the athletic race, and the crown for which all strove and but one possessed, and how lads and youths went in for the most severe training.

'That's like the Brummagin Pet and Darling Joe of South London do,' said Crop, whose attention was

riveted when Mr. Jarman plainly admitted the fact that there were boxing-matches in those days, with contests and other trials of skill, and all for crowns of wild olives that would fade in a few days.

'But surely there was a belt or money-prize?' inquired Dibs.

'No, there wasn't,' remarked Mr. Jarman. 'It was all for the honour and love of triumph.'

'Then p'raps they got up a subscription for the winner,' urged Dibs.

'No, I think not; the crown was enough, and it was made of myrtle or laurel, bay or olive leaves, and sometimes of flowers.'

'But all the lot of them things would wither or fade?' interposed one of the boys.

'Yes, so they did; but there was more glory in the faded wreaths than in many a coronet with gold and jewels,' said Mr. Jarman.

'That's a rum 'un,' said Crop.

'Please, teacher,' said another boy, does the Bible tell us all this?'

'No,' replied Mr. Jarman. 'What I am telling you now I found in this old book with these pictures in it. You see here is an illustration of the ancient fillet, and of crowns of great antiquity. Here is a page that shows us the seven different crowns the Romans had.' And he then proceeded to tell them the following facts:—

The first was the Mural Crown, given to him who

first scaled the walls of a besieged town, and was of gold, decorated with battlements. The next is the Camp Crown, given to the soldier who first forced his way into the enemy's camp; this was sometimes of gold. Another golden crown was given to anyone who won a naval victory, and was ornamented with the prows of ships. A Blockade Crown, made of grass gathered from the spot where the crown was given, to a general who liberated a beleaguered army. The Triumphal Crown

was the most famous, and only given to the greatest generals, who on their return from a victorious war entered the city of Rome in triumph. Then a crown was given to him who preserved the life of a Roman citizen at the risk of his own; it was called a Civic Crown, and was of simple oak leaves. The Olive Crown was given by the Romans to any common soldier who specially distinguished himself for courage.

'Paul, who must have seen the running and the wrestling among the young athletes of Greece and Asia Minor, striving for these wreaths and garlands that were frail and corruptible, and for the honour and fame which must pass away, spoke to men of an incorruptible crown, and of eternal glory and joy. He speaks of those who, through his teaching, loved the Saviour as his "joy and crown," just as I might speak of some of you who shall give your hearts to Christ, and grow up to live and work for Him, having first learnt to know Him and love Him through this class.'

'I don't see we could ever be yer crown, no matter however good we was,' said Crop, who saw things only from a very literal and matter-of-fact point of view.

'My word! we should be a whopping crown for you, particular when we was men,' remarked Dibs.

'What Paul meant was that he would reckon more joy and glory would be his in winning followers for Jesus, than running races and taking prizes on earth,' said Mr. Jarman.

'Well,' said one boy, 'I'd a deal sooner make sure of a good 'un here, than wait for a prize I might never see.'

'That's just the way with a good many more, who spend all their life trying to grab and keep a golden prize here, and too often miss it; or if they do win what they desire, they find it isn't as good as they thought it was, and that, like all earthly things, it must perish. Paul tells us that, while in the races of old only *one*

obtained the prize for which many strove, *all* may attain the crown that is incorruptible and fadeth not away.'

'You don't mean to say there is prizes for them as gets beaten and left behind!' said Dibs in astonishment.

'Yes I do,' said Mr. Jarman earnestly.

'It's all prizes, and no blanks!' ejaculated Crop.

'I suppose it's this way, teacher; big crowns for them as gets a long way ahead, and little 'uns for them as is not so good in their wind,' said Dibs, who was very anxious to account for such proceedings on reasonable grounds.

'Now listen: this crown of life, which is for all who will, is not like any earthly crown; it is *given* us, not earned or toiled for, and is worth more than all the other crowns on earth that are bought. We can never be good enough to win it by ourselves. This crown of life is not put on us as a reward, but it is that which grows out of the life from within. We speak of the crown of a hill, that's its highest part, and the crown of summer, that is when summer has reached its fulness, and the crown of old age is the rich maturity of wisdom and experience. So that this crown of life is the result of all the grace and help God gives us here, it is the beauty and glory, the sum of life's best. And we may live so that we shall be quite sure we shall possess this crown of life hereafter.'

'I don't see how,' said Dibs.

'Well, did you ever see a daisy, and notice that it

had a little boss or heart of gold, round which was a circle of tiny spikes? It always looks like a crown of gold, with silver rays for ornament. But if you were to go and look at the daisy-plant now, you would find no crown; you could not see it, but it is there, folded in the life of the daisy; and when the spring comes in the resurrection life you will see the flower, and with it the crown God has given, though now hidden in the winter life of earth. Just so, if we have the love and life of God in our hearts, the unseen crown of life is there, and when the winter sleep of death is over, and we wake in the spring time of the heavenly life, we shall have our crown, with only this difference, that it will not fade away.'

'Then I suppose, just as there are some little daisies and some bigger ones, so there will be some very small crowns and some big 'uns,' remarked Dibs.

'That is,' put in Crop, 'if yer grows good.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Jarman; 'if you grow up to be a stinging-nettle, you won't have the crown of a daisy.'

'But how is chaps like us to grow up good?' inquired one interested auditor who seldom spoke.

'Is there,' said Mr. Jarman, very earnestly, 'any boy in this class to-day who can answer that question?'

One boy timidly held out his hand. 'How?' said Mr. Jarman.

'By a-minding what Jesus said.'

'That will do, my boy; it's an answer that contains

all the law and the prophets, and the Gospel too only we can't mind what Jesus said until we love Him, then "what He saith" unto us, we can do. Jesus did good because He was good, and we only grow good by being made like Him, because we have received His Spirit, and love Him with all our hearts.'

'There goes the bell, teacher, and there were lots more things I wanted to ask about them crowns,' said Dibs.

'We shall be able to talk about them again on some other Sunday.'

'When is the anniversary, teacher?' asked one of the boys, as the books were being collected, and some of the other classes were coming back into their places for the close of school.

'I think it is this day four weeks,' said Mr. Jarman.

So that afternoon school ended with the practice of the special hymns; but into Dibs' mind had come some uncomfortable reflections, that this strange crown, not of gold, nor of flowers, but of *life*, could only come to those who would be good. Now that was the very thing Dibs desired not to be. He disliked people who were good in the abstract, and feared that to become good meant to part with one's friends, one's freedom, and all that was best here, for what was, after all, a very dim and unsubstantial glory hereafter; and yet there was something within him that made him long to be different from what he was. In spite of all his fears of being

made good, he could see the beauty and grandeur of goodness. To-day he had lifted up his eyes, and seen in-far off splendour the gleam of the crown of life; and the muck rake and dross could never again take his whole attention. He, like the knight in the legend of old, had caught faint vision of the Holy Grail, and unconsciously felt himself penetrated with a ray of light from the far-off spiritual city.

CHAPTER VI.

OUT TO TEA.

'No words of grace
Have equal weight with gracious deeds;
Better the love of Christlike doing
Than well-repeated, perfect creeds.'

DIBS' fears of being made good were not of long abiding, and he did his best to dissipate them. He had a vague, mysterious dread of religion. He felt conscious of a supernatural power that might perhaps suddenly overtake and make him 'good' in spite of himself. He was pervaded by a half-superstitious sense that places of worship and Sunday-schools were in some occult way connected with the Unseen. He wished to throw off this strange, dim, and wholly indescribable spirit that surrounded religion. But with these unbidden suggestions of fear there was in the heart of the lad a noble courage that strove with and fought all fear. Things to be feared had a kind of fascination for him, they allured him as with a spell. He never fled from danger, if he knew it; peril had its own charm, and the overcoming of fear was a supreme delight. Of course Dibs did not reason about these things, he acted upon impulse without much

consideration; but the reasons for conduct underlay his action as much as they do in the character of any great statesman.

He rebelled against this subtle awe that he could not understand, and without making any intentional determination to be troublesome or wicked, the very sanctity of the place of worship became a temptation that evoked a more than usual display of fun and unruly conduct. Times and seasons of great solemnity seemed appropriate opportunities for the exercise of levity, and little jokes would become to him more ridiculous by reason of the sombre contrast of order and decorum.

If there was one scene that filled Dibs with awe and wonder it was a funeral; there was even to him a kind of terror in the whole paraphernalia. He would go a long way to see a funeral, and wait for some time, and the nearer he got to the coffin the more solid satisfaction would he feel. The hearse, the coaches, the men in attendance, the pall, the black, the silence, the grief, all the details impressed him deeply. He could hardly see a hearse without following and questioning where it was going, and who it would take next. Death was to him the one mighty, appalling fact, a shadow that passed from street to street, vanishing from one house only to visit another. From infancy Dibs had been touched and haunted by this mystery that came by stealth, and gathered the living from the busy life never to return again, and was followed by a black procession in which

startlingly white handkerchiefs were always to be seen wiping the tears of anguish.

And yet, strange to say, if any one had asked Dibs what he would enjoy best and prefer of all things in this earth beneath the sunshine, his reply would have been, cheerful and instantaneous, 'A ride inside Macgregor's hearse,' for Macgregor was the undertaker of the neighbourhood, who had made a nice little competency out of epidemics, and did a very respectable 'black job' business among the poor and the burial clubs, and maintained by frequent advertisement that for 'style and economy' he was not to be surpassed in the South of London.

After Dibs had attended a funeral in a purely voluntary capacity, or had merely gone to watch outside the house of mourning until the coffin appeared, he always felt it was incumbent on him to recuperate his spirits by some little extra indulgence in merriment. A Lancashire satirist has said that funerals in the County Palatine are the occasions of great thirst; whatever they may be elsewhere, they are in London the opportunities of much unnecessary expenditure and extravagance. Doubtless this is to be accounted for by the fact that there is no time in human experience when money seems to be of so little worth, and when almost anything that seems like any expression of respect or affection to the memory of those gone cannot be withheld. However, a more simple, more reasonable, and more Christian opinion is

gradually being formed on the subject, which was entirely unknown to Dibs.

The funeral fever with Dibs arose from his love of crowds, sensational sights, his curiosity and broad sympathies, as well as that finest subtle instinct of pathos by which all hearts are touched in the common bond of sorrow, and the absolute certainty that death will some day come to all. It is these invisible threads in metropolitan life that unite the luxury of the West to the squalor of the East, and make Ratcliff Highway and the Mint to be part of the same city as Buckingham Palace and May Fair, and not their geographical juxtaposition.

It was one dirty, foggy December day, on a Saturday afternoon, that Dibs had been indulging himself by watching a more than usually costly and magnificent funeral display from the cheap stand-point of the street pavement. The obsequies had drawn a large crowd; boys and girls innumerable, untidy women without hats or bonnets, many with infants in arms. All the back-door scenes were transferred to the front. Every door and window on both sides the street had eager occupants; dirty white aprons and gossip seemed the leading characteristics of the desultory observers. The children were running and playing, as if waiting for a Punch and Judy exhibition, except a few who were patiently waiting close to the house of mourning. The public-house at one corner of the street had done a brisker

trade than usual, because the Angel of Death and Mr. Macgregor had visited the adjacent street. Among those who pressed round the door from which the expected coffin was soon to issue, Dibbs stood in what he thought a good position, when another boy edged himself a little in front. The bearers had gone in; it was, figuratively, the eleventh hour; to fight for his place was probably to lose the sight, for several children were saying—

'They're a coming! They're a coming!'

Dibs elbowed his foe out of the way as much as possible, then at the very moment when the prophecy was fulfilled, he snatched the cap off his adversary's head and tried to throw it into the open hearse; but it fell below the door, and shot under the wheels. And when the bearers had done their work, and the tossing plumes moved on for the first coach to draw up, the boy darted off to secure his cap before it was trampled on by the prancing black horses as they came up to the door of the house.

Dibs remained where he was to see all he could, and while he was watching the swaying, jolting, black mourning carriages slowly move off, bearing the grief-stricken to the saddest of all services, being undecided whether to follow or not, though a very thin drizzle seemed setting in as he stood, he was whistling—

'Jesus comes, the heavens adoring,
Comes in deep humility;'

and Mr. Jarman's voice was saying,

'Why, Dibs, I was just thinking about you.'

'Was you?' said the laconic Dibs.

'So you have been watching poor Mr. Decoy's funeral.'

'It was a beautiful coffin, I 'erd 'em say so, and there was a big crown of flowers on top, like them you was a telling us about, only these 'ere was all white uns.'

'Yes, he was one of God's own heroes,' said Mr. Jarman.

'Did you know 'im, teacher?'

'Yes, I knew poor Mr. Decoy.'

'Was he very poor? is he any poorer now? I 'ave often 'erd people say, "*Poor* feller, he's dead!" when they couldn't abin a much wuss off aliving.'

'No,' said Mr. Jarman; 'it was my mistake; one gets in the habit of speaking so: but George Decoy ain't wuss off now than he was; bless you, if any one ever lived and died, and was better off for the change, he is. He was one of the grandest chaps I ever knew. He was a blacksmith.'

'I know'd the shop where he used to work; but I never knew his name till he died; he worked at the back where the fire and the bellows is. When it's bin

starving cold he'd let me and Crop stand in there and warm ourselves, if we didn't carry on no larks; and once I blowed the bellows, and it's deal easier to blow than the orgin; for I went once to help blow at St. Agnes with Tom Fipps, who blowed there regular. I was to blow with him, but we was so squeezed up in a 'ole that we couldn't both hang on to the pump-'andle together, so I says, "Let's take turn and turn about." He know'd all the business, did Tom, and was in the Amens just proper; then I takes my turn at a hymn, which is plain sailing; when I was blowing away fit to bust up every thing in the place, the choir were going it like mad, and Jones, the orgin player, fetched out every stop, and went for a thunder-storm, and Tom was larfing fit to kill 'isself to see me a taring my arms out of my shirt and jacket while I followed that old 'andle a up and down till the breath was out of my body. I had filled the thing chock-full of wind, as there was a pause before the last verse, then they all

starts off with a crash. I makes a stop just to get wind, and kept looking at the teller, when all of a sudden up she goes, and that orgin was as quiet as sawdust. Tom flies to the pump, but there weren't room for two to work it; he jams me up inside, so that the 'andle wouldn't go up or down. In a couple of shakes, round comes Jones, all red and angry, pulls us both out, and says to me, "Just you wait there till the General Thanksgiving," and goes off.

'Tom takes the pump, and I says, "What's the General Thanksgiving?" "It's a long prayer towards the end of the service, just long enough to kick you out and come back for the Amen." After that I didn't wait to find my cap, but sneaked out right by Jones while he was playing the next Amen. I never blowed another orgin after that, and only once the bellows for the smith.'

'It was very like his kindness to let you lads go and warm yourselves by his fire. He did many a noble deed that will never be known on earth. He used to come to our little chapel, but no one seemed to know how good he was until he took ill, he was that quiet. He was very badly used by the people at the shop, for they as bad as stole the business from him while he was ill, and I don't think wife or child will get a penny.'

'What a grand funeral! I thought they was rich to have such a big 'un,' said Dibs.

'I think the friends pay for that, and wished it done

respectable. They did little enough for him while he lived; but it's poor comfort now to spend all that when it's too late. If they had only cared more when he was alive, they 'ud had done more good with their money. I only went to see him a few times, and I knows they was very short of victuals.'

'Was they?' said Dibs feelingly.

'But it was grand to see him and hear him. Why, at times he almost seemed to see the crown of life. He suffered agony, but was meek and gentle as a child. He used to say, "I feel like a big baby." I never saw any one so brave and patient. It was just like some story one reads of in books, where martyrs died with clouds of angels all round them, and mid the smoke and torture of fire they sang praises, and held out their hands for the flowers and messengers and loving ones awaiting them and coming to them from the painless land. I never saw any one so happy with poverty and suffering, sorrow and death close to him; but he said that if the Lord had given him anything to bear, the gift was worth having, if it came from Him.

'He's awearing his crown now, I suppose?' enquired Dibs.

'May be,' replied Mr. Jarman; 'but the life on t'other side ain't like this one. He's got the best result of his life in the Kingdom, that's his crown; for gold and silver don't reckon for anything. It 's all joy, peace, and happiness.'

Dibs did not seem satisfied; for no crown seemed real that was not of gold and gems, visible and wearable. As they walked on, Mr. Jarman said:

'I reckon it's much like this. When you was a littler chap than you are, if any one had offered you a bright new penny and a dingy half-sovereign, of which you did not know the value, you would have chosen the penny; but now you would take the half-sov., because you know it's really worth more. Well, by and by, when we grows up into true knowledge, we shall find goodness to be better than gold, just as we know gold to be of more value than copper now.'

By this time they had passed out beyond the street, and were going in the direction of Mr. Jarman's home. He had always liked Dibs from the first time he saw him; but he felt a deeper interest in him by reason of this talk that had been so unexpected. He was a man not naturally given to hospitality; but still he wished to have a lasting influence on this boy's character. The idea crossed his mind that if he asked Dibs home it might involve an invitation to the boys all round. However, the impulse was too strong to be resisted, so he said:

'Dibs, will you come home with me—I live close by here—and have tea?'

'Well,' said Dibs, 'I shall have a bite, I expect, before I go to bed, or any rate, father will bring home some-

thing before morning.' The boy had no idea of eating at anybody's expense, unless it was a case of absolute necessity.

'You'd better come along,' said Mr. Jarman, kindly.

'I ain't so very hungry,' said Dibs, not knowing what to say and do. For having tea at Mr. Jarman's house might lay him under an obligation to be good. He would like to go, but did not wish to incur any responsibility.

'You'll be quite welcome,' said his host.

'Shall you expect me to do anything Sunday because I comes?' asked Dibs, anxious to have things fair and square.

'Oh no,' said Mr. Jarman, understanding the boy's meaning at once. 'You will be quite independent to go or stay, as you like.'

That word 'independent' was good, very good. It was quite out of Dibs' own vocabulary, but he had a full idea of its meaning. Thus freed from legal claims, somehow a deeper sense of moral bonds rested with weight upon his conscience; but, at any rate, the way seemed reasonably opened for the acceptance of this remarkable invitation.

'Well, I'll come along with you; but I ain't got no better things to come in,' said Dibs, rather dismayed at the thought of his garments, the condition of which seldom troubled him.

'Never mind about that; as long as you can eat

something in 'em you'll be welcome,' rejoined Mr. Jarman.

They soon arrived at Mr. Jarman's private residence in Abbey Street. It was a poor-looking house, which was occupied by three families—two upstairs, while Mr. and Mrs. Jarman held the ground-floor. On entering, Mr. Jarman said:

'Missus, I have brought one of my boys to tea.'

'Then make yourself at home,' replied Mrs. Jarman, looking at Dibs as he removed his cap, and appeared awkward and uncomfortable.

Mrs. Jarman's injunction was about the last thing Dibs could do. He sat down near the fire on a chair Mr. Jarman pushed toward him, and took stock of the place. Although, from many points of view, the room was scantily and poorly furnished, yet it was clean, and seemed to Dibs a palace in comparison to the wretched room he called home. Mrs. Jarman busied herself making preparation for the meal, which the boy watched with interest. It was a pleasant sight for Dibs to behold; especially was it good to notice the toasting of the rounds of bread, until quite a column rose on a plate set down upon the fender, each layer of which was spread with butter. When all was ready, it did look a most inviting repast. The items of luxury were a loaf of bread-and-butter—all 'the pieces' of bread and two crusts had been enlisted into the rank of buttered toast; beside this dainty there was a pot of treacle and a kind

of lard-cake, in which a few currants disported themselves at somewhat distant intervals. This was placed in the middle as a crowning delicacy. All at last was ready, grace said by Mr. Jarman, and Dibs invited to help himself, and 'make a tea.'

He had told Mr. Jarman that he was not so *very* hungry. What the result might have been it is impossible to say had he possessed a larger appetite; but Dibs did his best to assist in all but clearing the table. Except the foundation of the loaf and a little treacle, all vanished; only the crockery remained to be removed.

When the meal was over Mr. Jarman made a few inquiries about Dibs' mode of life, and suggested that he might come there one evening in the week, to improve in his reading and writing, if he liked.

The boy was quite willing to come, and asked what evening would do. Mr. Jarman said any night but Monday, which was Band of Hope night, and Friday Dibs was engaged with the choir practice. Wednesday he would prefer, but that was Chapel night, so Tuesday night was fixed. Mr. Jarman spoke to Dibs about the Band of Hope, and very earnestly asked the boy to come, and said a word about being an abstainer, at the same time telling him not to feel he need come to any meeting, because he had only asked him to tea in a friendly way.

Then Dibs deemed it time to depart, and said good-

night to his host and hostess, entirely satisfied with his refreshment and entertainment, feeling that Mr. Jarman stood very nearly as high up in his opinion as some of the most popular 'Jocks' of the turf and the leading favourites of the prize ring.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SQUIB AND THE MOUSE.

'We honour most, when most we trust,
With no distrust because we must.'

MR. JARMAN'S kindness had really won Dibs' heart. Many signs of reform were visible. He came to Sunday-school regularly, and though troublesome and full of mischief, the worry of the officers of the school, he was docile and obedient to his teacher. A bond of personal and mutual attachment enabled Mr. Jarman to exercise a strong controlling and constraining influence without apparently manifesting authority. Mr. Jarman knew well the wild, untamable spirit he had to do with. To fight out a battle for mastery would be a long and doubtful struggle; to conquer by silent and unconscious affection was his only hope. In time he felt sure he could weave such bonds of trust and affection that rebellion would be impossible. He knew the boy's spirit would never be broken, or his will bent, without ruin to his character. Hence he desired the unbroken spirit and strong will should be directed to noble purpose. He

did not study the boy's individualism nor reason and philosophise about his training. If anyone had said to him, 'How are you going to manage that boy Dibs?' his reply would have been—

'I can't manage him, and ain't going to try; he beats me, he's just like a zebra of the wilderness or colt of the prairies, and maybe God never meant 'em to run in harness; but Providence don't make mistakes with zebras, nor yet with boys like Dibs. All the apostles was boys once, and when Peter was a young 'un, he might have been just such another scamp, for anything I know to the contrary. Only think what a mighty power for usefulness the grace of God would be in a chap like Dibs. God doesn't make an "odd lot" like him for nothing; but I shan't try to manage him any more than I should a pieana or a hurricane, neither of which instruments have I been taught to play.'

It was quite sufficient for Mr. Jarman that he liked Dibs, and that there was a good understanding between them.

The leader of the singing soon discovered that Dibs was incorrigible; 'a young scapegrace, that would spit in your face as soon as look at you,' he said of him. He therefore treated him 'very gingerly,' as he described it, and was quite careful to give no cause of offence, because of his beautiful gift, that only needed to be called out.

Dibs was one of those lads who never knew discipline

and control, had always been his own master, and ruled as king and chief in his dominion of friends. If any one disputed his right or questioned his will, he appealed to war, and fought for victory or defeat. Where he knew force was too strong for him, there he submitted with stubborn courage to the hard law of necessity.

Dibs went to the Band of Hope. He knew the evils of drink, but had never associated the results with the cause. He was surprised to hear beer-drinking and selling so severely denounced, for he always had a 'drop' whenever he could get it, and, lad as he was, whenever he had coppers he liked getting beer at a public house, and then handing the pewter to the circle of friends, saying, 'Now drink fair,' and he would see they did too.

In the Band of Hope there was a liberty and air of freedom which was not allowed in Sunday-school; this pleased him. Dibs was really persuaded by what he heard that drink was bad, and thought he would like to sign the pledge, but the moral ground was too weak for him. It was absurd to join the Band of Hope for safety or for good of others; but he considered he might justify himself to all his pals on the ground that there was going to be a magic lantern exhibition and a tea, after the New Year. This was an argument all would understand, and on giving this reason none would think it was because he was 'getting good.'

So he was made a member of the Band of Hope, and because he joined others of his acquaintance did so, stimulated by the two-fold appeal of the entertainment and tea. The advent of these lads almost imperilled the existence of the Band of Hope. For its management became almost the despair of its promoters.

The evening of the dissolving views entertainment was an occasion of supreme delight. With the darkness the turbulent spirit of the rougher boys rose to a high pitch of excitement. When the gas was turned out the performance began; the lads made a fearful noise, giving sound to the loudest of mortal whistles; peas flew about in all directions. So great became the uproar that the exhibitor declared he would leave without showing another picture unless order was restored and maintained. Several attempts were made to quiet the disturbance; at last the gas had to be relit and preparations made for closing the entertainment. Mr. Jarman had entered a few minutes before, and when the light was turned up he saw Dibs surrounded by a chosen few capable of any mischief, Crop and others of the same brand sprinkled about in different parts of the audience, evidently to distract attention from their revered ringleader. Mr. Jarman made his way to Dibs' side, and after some confusion sat down beside him.

When order was a little more possible, Mr. Jarman said loudly—

'It's a pity to close the show, to which we have all

looked forward, because one or two boys are making a disturbance. I am willing to go bail for the unruly boys, and if need be to be turned out of the Band of Hope for their sakes.' Mr. Jarman said this with such deep feeling that it made a strong impression, and these few words were followed by a dead silence.

It was quite enough. The exhibitor proceeded without any further interruption. During the evening Dibs whispered to Mr. Jarman—

'Here, teacher, take this away from me,' thrusting something into his hand.

'What is it?' said Mr. Jarman.

'It's a squib,' whispered Dibs, very low.

'Have you got any more?' asked the teacher quietly.

'No,' responded the boy.

'You are sure that's all?' inquired the teacher.

'Some of the others 'as crackers and little 'uns, but they won't let their'n off till my big 'un goes. We was going to wait till it was nearly over, so as not to lose more of the show than we could help. Take it from me, teacher, do!' pleaded the boy. 'I know I shall let it off if you don't.'

Mr. Jarman put the combustible into his breast pocket.

'I am sorry to disappoint t'others, but I shall tell 'em you took it from me before I got the match out to light it.'

Mr. Jarman felt this was a very serious business, and did not know what to say or do, so he remained silent. He knew there must have been with Dibs a great struggle to tell him this. He, too, felt he had been trusted by the boy beyond any expectation of confidence.

The rest of the evening passed off peaceably. The audience dispersed; outside, a cracker or two went off as the people departed. A small knot of boys gathered round their young chief, to learn the reason of the failure of their plot. They had all vanished as Mr. Jarman made his way home, longing for wisdom and guidance so to act that he might direct the wandering steps of this boy into the unerring way of light and love and peace.

After this, Dibs for some time conducted himself without attracting any particular attention. The Sunday-school anniversary sermons had passed off well; the singing had gone very creditably. In fact, Dibs' voice had contributed greatly to the success of the services. He had sung one verse as a solo, so that many had remarked it was quite a treat to hear the boy sing. Even the Rev. Isaac Birley, who was pastor of the chapel, had several times spoken to the leader of the singing in terms of praise about him. In fact, the choir-master was very proud of Dibs, and meant if possible to bring him out, as he felt sure he was a young genius full of promise, that might be a wonder some day.

Dibs' outward appearance had been considerably

transformed since he had joined the choir, for which he had to endure a great deal of chaff. However, he was too popular with his large circle of street acquaintances for his reputation to be seriously injured by better clothes on Sundays, which his father had procured for him second-hand, in the hope of encouraging him in what he thought might be an opening for the boy to better himself.

Mr. Jarman had little or no trouble with Dibs, though he was said to be the worst boy in the school, and the constant worry of the officials because of insolence and disorderly conduct. Mr. Jarman was often blamed by his co-workers for not exercising more authority over him, but he knew quite well that authority was the one thing that the lad resented. He was no respecter of persons; he simply 'cared for nobody,' as he often declared. He would have thought no more of the authority of the parson or the superintendent than a Protestant does of that of the Pope.

One Sunday, Dibs set off to school in high spirits. He fell in with Crop at the door, and said confidentially as they entered, 'I am going to have a lark to-day. Old Snowls will be off his head with rage.'

'What is it?' whispered Crop.

'Never you mind; you'll see!' said Dibs.

During the opening part of school, his conduct had been quite exemplary, except that he never took his hand out of his jacket-pocket until the prayer began;

then he removed from his side-pocket a remarkably fine mouse, which he showed with much affection to those boys who stood behind Mr. Jarman, who was, as usual, leaning over the pew-door, which was half open.

'What are you going to do with it?' said one.

'Give him a run in the chapel, to amuse the girls and wake up old Snowls.'

With that Dibs crawled under the seat, to avoid any contact with Mr. Jarman's legs. The pew-door was open wide enough for him to reach his arm through more than half across the narrow aisle. This he accomplished quite noiselessly, while Mr. Snowls continued his supplications. The pew-door opposite was likewise open, but the teacher's eyes were not closed, which Dibs could not observe. He gently threw the little animal in at the open door. The teacher instantly saw the mouse, and the rapidly withdrawn arm of a boy in Mr. Jarman's class.

This teacher had an exceptional dislike to such creatures, and gave a little scream, and jumped up on the seat. One or two girls saw the bewildered quadruped, and took fright. One called out—

'Oh, it's a rat!'

Another said, 'No, it isn't, it's a mouse.'

The teacher was joined by two or three, who sought refuge by standing up on the pew-seat.

Dibs was up the instant after the mouse had left on its travels, and had struck an attitude of pious devotion by nursing his elbow in the palm of one hand, and covering his face with the widely-spread fingers of the other.

Several of the scholars were attracted by the evident commotion in the third girls' class, but no one seemed to know what was the matter, until one of the infants sung out loudly—

'Holloa, teacher, here's a mouse!'

There was a scramble among the small fry; some turned out into the aisle to give chase, but away scuttled the intruder, and this time to run through a class of delighted boys, who clapped their hands, and shied their hymn-books and caps, and whatever they could, at the young disturber. Still Mr. Snowls prayed on for a few seconds, as again there was silence. The secretary was walking quietly down the aisle to see what was the matter. When at the extreme corner, the poor frightened creature had visited another class of girls, and they were ready to scream out, fairly shrieking with laughing and silly fear. This threw the whole school into disorder, for every one began to think the mouse was at their feet, and several were calling out—

'There it is!' 'There it is again!'

Mr. Snowls broke off his prayer, and begun ringing the bell and asking for order. But this was no easy

business to secure. The uproar rather increased, many of the girls were standing on the benches, some of the boys doing the same, to obtain a better view of the whole scene.

Then the secretary kept walking about, assuring everyone that the poor little thing had escaped. He explained matters to Mr. Snowls, who was angry that so much disorder had been caused by the appearance of 'a poor little mouse.' It became evident at length that the cause of the disturbance had vanished, and gradually the school subsided into its normal state.

The classes were dismissed to their places, and Dibs inwardly rejoiced at the success of his enterprise; it had really caused more diversion than he had hoped, and he felt satisfied that he should remain undiscovered.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNANSWERED YET.

'More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and night.
For what are men better than sheep or goats,
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hand of prayer,
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?'

Tennyson.

As the afternoon school wore on the lady teacher of the third girls' class told the secretary when he came for the class books that she believed one of the boys in Mr. Jarman's class brought that rat or mouse to school, and during the prayer threw it into their class. When Mr. Lobson had received this information he went immediately to the superintendent and repeated the story, saying he had no doubt that the young rascal was Dibs.

Mr. Snowls said that if he could only make sure, and find any kind of proof that it was Dibs, he would make an example of him before the school. The secretary immediately went to consult the lady teacher, who said

the only way in which she could identify the boy who did this was by the fact that round his wrist he had a black band or strap. Because all she saw was the lad's arm. This was quite enough. Mr. Lobson found an excuse, and visited Mr. Jarman's class on a tour of inspection, and noticed that Dibs wore the badge on his right wrist. It was conclusive, and accordingly he made his report to Mr. Snowls, who thought he had the culprit in a nice trap, and intended to make a solemn use of the occasion.

Exactly to the time the bell was rung, and the classes all reassembled in their places for the closing exercises Comparative silence had been gained, when Mr. Snowls struck an imposing attitude, and assumed his most important tone of voice. He began by saying he was going to speak to the school on those words, 'Be sure your sin will find you out,' and before he finished he would give them a proof of the truth of those very words. After speaking of many kinds of sin that were sure to result in the discovery of the sinner, and bring with them the penalty of shame and retribution, he dwelt long on the iniquity of lying, cheating, disobedience, thieving, swearing, and Sabbath-breaking. Then he came to the wickedness of bad behaviour in God's house, making light of prayer, and rebellion against the law of God in small things as well as great, telling the story of the awful judgment that befel Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

Dibs had paid no attention at all to the address until this remarkable narrative, which of course he had never heard before, fairly arrested his whole interest. Especially as Mr. Snowls continued: 'In closing I must allude to the disgraceful conduct that marked the opening prayer, the cause of which I have been enabled to find out; and I have traced the guilty party, though he does not know that his sin has led us to discover what a wicked, deceitful, daring and trifling lad he really is. But now I ask all the school to look while I call out the presumptuous and godless sinner. It is a boy, I am sorry to say, in Mr. Jarman's class who goes by the name of Dibs. I now ask that boy to stand out from his class and come up here to me.'

Then followed an awful pause. Poor Mr. Jarman looked very much distressed, and turned to Dibs, saying something no one heard, but evidently urging him to go up to the superintendent and say he was sorry for his conduct. Under the strong pressure of Mr. Jarman's influence he rose and came out into the aisle, with a half-amused and indifferent air.

Mr. Snowls, seeing Dibs hesitate, said: 'Come along, my boy; you needn't be afraid of me—only fear sin.'

To which Dibs responded with a loud rude laugh, stretching out his hand, and pointing his finger in scorn: 'Do you think I am afraid of an old bloke like you? Why, if you touched me I'd kick you into a cocked hat, or summons you. I ain't sorry I dun it,' said Dibs,

looking at Mr. Jarman; 'only wish there was twenty of 'em, and that they had been all rats and a ferret.'

With this he looked round and made a turn toward the door, but the secretary had expected a scene, and was too sharp for him, having closed it, and placed himself on guard. Dibs, seeing he was baulked, stood

for a moment at bay. Knowing that there was no other way of escape, he made a furious rush at the officer on duty. The secretary closed with him, and a scuffle ensued, in which Dibs displayed an unlooked-for agility, and nearly got the door open. All the

time Mr. Snowls was saying at intervals during the struggle that now absorbed the attention of the whole school—

'Bring him up here, mister.'

But it was no easy matter; it was all very well for the superintendent to command, the secretary was almost calling for help to keep the boy from the door, he could hardly maintain his ground; one instant the boy was on the floor, the next between his legs.

Mr. Snowls nodded to one or two of the male teachers to go to the assistance of the secretary. He did not like to ask one of them, lest his request might not be complied with. The excitement was growing; several boys were saying, 'Go it, little 'un.' Mr. Snowls called out in his loudest voice—

'Mr. Jarman, you do not seem to observe that one of your boys is causing a most disgraceful scene.'

Mr. Jarman took no notice, he did not even turn round. The superintendent covered Mr. Jarman's entire disregard of his appeal by saying—

'P'raps Mr. Jarman's way is best—take no notice of this wicked boy.'

It was now too late for such an exhortation, no one paid the smallest attention, and it was evident unless authority prevailed the school would be in an uproar. The librarian had come in from the infant class room, to see the occasion of the noise and confusion. Mr. Snowls at once beckoned him, and then requested that he

would help Mr. Lobson to bring the boy up to the front.

Mr. Snowls, junior, complied with his father's request, and hastened to the relief of the secretary, who was now fairly excited, and trembling with anger and exertion. Under the escort of these two men poor Dibs was dragged up the aisle, and violently pushed to the front before Mr. Snowls, who, although greatly irritated and 'upset' by this scene, assumed the air of an offended judge — silence once more spread over the assembly—and he said, pointing to the culprit—

'Boys and girls, look at this bad boy, and see what comes of trifling in God's house. I see he is in no fit humour to be spoken to now, so I'll ask our kind friends to whom he has given so much trouble to place him in the vestry, where I will speak to him after school.'

With this Dibs was reluctantly removed, and, with every form of opposition that body, legs, and teeth could supply, he was 'run in' to the vestry.

Mr. Snowls continued the long address with many words of warning concerning the retribution that would surely follow such misconduct as had been witnessed. He further maintained that the boy after this deserved to be expelled from the school, but it was the bad boys they all so wished to reclaim; he therefore asked the teachers, one and all, to stay behind to have a special prayer-meeting on behalf of this hardened boy. And

he would let the school know even more decidedly in the future that he would be obeyed, and if he said a boy should stand out he would see it was done, and in this way he would enforce order and good behaviour.

So the school closed, Mr. Snowls believing that a great moral victory had been gained by Dibs being exhibited before the school as the boy who had brought the mouse; but, like a great many other victories, its final issue was doubtful, it was very costly, and did not secure peace.

Dibs in the meantime had remained in the vestry. Mr. Snowls went in as soon as the classes were dismissed, while the teachers were assembling for the prayer-meeting in the infant class room. He found Dibs in no mood to receive any words of exhortation with profit. He told him how sorry he felt that he showed no sign of repentance, warned him he would come to some bad end, and reminded him of the fate of a murderer that had lately come to the gallows at Newgate. Seeing he could make no impression, he bade him remember that the teachers were going to have a special prayer-meeting on his behalf, and then sent the lad away. Mr. Snowls held out his hand to Dibs, who, with a moment's pause and pang of conscience, made a face at him, and hurried off.

Mr. Snowls' better spirit was almost subdued by this, and he nearly boxed the boy's ears at parting. Dibs, on the contrary, was really touched by the offered hand,

and when he got outside he came back to look in at the door, feeling he would say or do something, but Mr. Snowls had gone into the infants' room, and the chapel was empty. So he fled to his companions, whom he told in language truly awful with oaths that after all 'old Snowls wasn't such a fearful bad 'un, for we was nearly doing the pump-handle business to end with.'

Dibs, in an indefinite way, thought of the proffered hand as a sign of truce; and if Mr. Snowls, the leader of the opposition, would let the matter drop, he would honour the white flag of peace. To him the question was only that of a lark, in which he had been found out by some one 'sneaking,' and thus he had been shamefully exposed. He considered he had been hardly dealt with, but owed the school no grudge, and would of course go again on Sunday because he liked Mr. Jarman.

On the other hand, Mr. Snowls looked on Dibs as a hardened, impenitent lad, that rejected human mercy with insolence. With a ruffled temper that had parted with the last grain of patience, he joined the teachers. He spoke to them about the disappointments and discouragements in the work, then asked for two earnest prayers and requested special remembrance for this troublesome lad, that seemed to be on the highway, unless the grace of God interposed, for the downward path that leads to ruin and hell. Then Mr. Snowls prayed himself into sincere anxiety for the boy's future;

he pleaded that the Lord would change his vile heart and make him a chosen vessel of mercy, that he might be arrested in his depraved career before it was too late. He besought the God of judgment to have pity on this incorrigible, and add to His glory by the conversion of this chief among a band of young sinners. He prayed for the teacher of his class, that he might have abundant wisdom vouchsafed to him in the exercise of his difficult duty, and supplicated with faith and zeal for immediate tokens of success and increased evidence of the Divine favour and blessing in this special work of the Sunday-school carried on at the Bethesda Chapel.

During the prayer-meeting Mr. Jarman's heart was too full to take any part, though he joined in every petition for Dibs' future prosperity. He was deeply grieved at what had happened, feared the effect of the afternoon's treatment might be to prevent Dibs ever coming to school again; but at the same time he felt devoutly thankful for the prayer-meeting, being fully convinced that though they might all err in their management of the boy, God's way with him would be right, and that in taking and leaving this child to the Father's care it must surely be for ever well with him. He knew how of old Jesus had healed the sick on account of the faith of those who brought them. So he went away from that little gathering not weary in well-doing or disappointed, but hopeful and trustful, being wholly assured that the Father, who knows all needs,

must care infinitely more for the restoration of this wild lad of the wayside than he did, and that in ways they knew not would more than answer all their prayers.

He went home to ask for all help and strength in the guidance of the few lads entrusted to him; his desire was simply to teach them the highest truth in a way they could understand, and to exercise over them the same kind of personal influence that the Friend of Sinners did over the little band of twelve in the first school of Christian instruction.

Mr. Jarman waited through the week in doubt and expectancy, wondering whether Dibs would be in his place in class on Sunday afternoon. When the time arrived he went to school with many misgivings, but on entering the chapel he saw to his relief and pleasure the head of Dibs above the pew. After he had sat down and asked the silent blessing on the class, which little performance always interested Dibs, though reverently now, the teacher's first impulse was to tell Dibs frankly how pleased he was to see him there; but when he observed that the boy seemed wholly to have buried the past, and was anxious for his unbiased opinion on some startling revelations in the *Police News* of which his teacher was utterly ignorant, Mr. Jarman determined to say nothing. Almost immediately another lad entered the class, and at once turned to Dibs, saying—

'Hullow! you here again!'

'Why,' said Dibs, 'what's the matter?'

'After old Snowls treated you to a bit of his best pickled tongue, as he did last Sunday, I'd never come inside this here school again.'

'I don't care for Snowls; this here ain't his shop, is it, teacher?'

'No,' said Mr. Jarman; 'this is God's house, and does not belong to any one person.'

'There, I told yer,' said Dibs, 'old Snowls ain't nobody. I didn't come because Snowls asked me, and I shan't stay away for him. I shall come when I like, and go when I like. I comes because I likes teacher.'

He said this without any intention of being complimentary to Mr. Jarman; it was just a statement of the truth.

The lesson passed off well, and Dibs having no intention of disturbing the school, after the dismissal of the classes, he waited behind to walk part of the way home with Mr. Jarman, an expression of good will which the teacher marked with more of inward gladness than he would have received a message from the Queen informing him of a promise of knighthood.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CRISIS.

'It is a crisis; and time to think of it. I have roughly and broadly put it before you in its darkness. Let us look what we may find of light.'—*Ruskin.*

THE career of Dibs was not a smooth or happy one. The wild, restless spirit chafed against all restraint. He was like some horses, who will go well if those who drive them only use a snaffle, but let the curb be taken up and they become unmanageable at once, and the more they are thrashed the more restive they become.

Mr. Snowls dealt with all the boys alike on this one principle: use kindness, then if that does not succeed, force and severity must follow. To do him justice, he believed this was the Divine method; grace first, and if that failed to convince, or was sinned against, then the only alternative was judgment.

Mr. Jarman's view of the case was wholly different. He acted from instinct rather than from theory; but he often said, 'God never made two boys alike, neither in face nor nature, and no two were ever treated in the same

way by the Heavenly Father.' Having no children of his own, he did not know how to manage them from parental experience, and had no plan, fallible or infallible, to adopt in training his scholars. Only of this fact he was certain, that he was saved by grace in the fullest sense, and that punishment and judgment, however necessary in this world, had little power to save or redeem, and as a means of salvation were hardly within his province to adopt. To him the one supreme word of the gospel was love, and the cross of Jesus was its greatest witness. It was simply the sublime compassion and pity of Jesus that had spoken to his heart, touched him, and drawn him into humble fellowship. He knew nothing of philosophy, would have been sadly wanting in the school of theology, but he had felt the love of God shed abroad in his heart. Religion with him had no definition. It was no set of formulated opinions, it was altogether born of the Spirit, formed for him out of personal love to Christ, leading him like a little child more and more into the height and depth, the length and breadth of the love of God. With him it was, the more of godliness the more of mystery.

Mr. Snowls kept his eye on Dibs. He was a marked boy in the official mind of the secretary. The lady teacher who had detected his transgression with the mouse often used him as a near-to-hand illustration of youthful impiety, and the dreadful example of what depravity could do for a boy. With one or two of the

teachers he became a standing warning to their class, a sort of model-bad-companion-boy.

Dibs was troublesome to the choirmaster, and was looked upon as a contaminating influence among the singers. But his voice was good, and the rapid way he picked up all musical instruction made Mr. Tubbs determine to try and keep the boy at all cost, if humouring and coaxing would do it. This was little or no temptation to Dibs, for, unlike a modern politician of whom a journal said, 'his course of conduct was guided by the desire to foster his social pride,' Dibs could hardly be beguiled by the rank and honours offered him by Mr. Tubbs.

Dibs' chapel experiences were not joyous. He did not feel at home in the services of the sanctuary. He was there solely for the singing, and as that formed the minor part of the whole exercises, the balance being greatly in favour of the minister, he did not know how to employ the time that was monopolized by the Rev. Isaac Birley. He had frequently been reproved for trifling behaviour by Mr. Tubbs and the senior members of the choir. Exhortations, warnings, and even threats had been administered again and again, but all to no purpose. He came with unfailing regularity; it might be said of him he was never absent, never late; with almost more than astronomical punctuality, he arrived before time, employing all spare and unoccupied minutes with a variety of games and tricks of the most odd and

amusing nature. He always seemed able to provide some new diversion for the gratification of his friends and the agitation of his enemies. Mr. Tubbs was urged to dismiss him from the choir, because his behaviour was so conspicuous. Mr. Snowls was told that the boy was a disgrace to the place, and ought to be expelled from the school. But, as a singer, he was too great an acquisition for Mr. Tubbs to do more than threaten and flatter. His voice improved Sunday by Sunday, and his singing grew sweeter and sweeter.

In the school it was Mr. Jarman's influence that kept him. Mr. Jarman, personally, had no trouble with him. He probably would have done anything he told him, not from any sense of duty, but because he liked him. He now seldom or never misbehaved himself in the class. But distance from his teacher seemed to lessen the restraining influence. If ever he were good, or resisted temptations to extremely outrageous conduct, it was to please Mr. Jarman. Often did Mr. Jarman speak earnestly to him about his wild, disorderly ways, and never without effect. It was this bond of attachment that held Dibs to all that was best, and kept him at school and chapel. But he was determined that his religious connections should in no way damage his reputation for being a young dare-devil. One thing was certain, if he came to chapel and school, he was not going to be coerced into being made a good boy.

He gloried in being a match for all of them. When

the chapel-keeper once threatened to thrash him, Dibs invited him to lay as much as a finger on him, and said he would summons him. If a deacon kindly remonstrated with him, he would be impertinent, or use bad language. The minister had referred pointedly to him from the pulpit; but this with Dibs was a distinction that he coveted, and went away to speak of it with pride and exultation. He had made a reputation in the place that no one else had ever done; he was always spoken of as 'that boy Dibs;' 'the most incorrigible young rascal I ever met.' 'Yet,' many said, 'now I like that boy Dibs;' 'there's the making of a man in him;' 'no one can do anything with him except Mr. Jarman;' 'but there's no vice about him.' 'He's just full of mischief.' 'It's a treat for any one to hear him sing.' These were some of the kindlier judgments passed on him by members of the church and congregation.

The situation in every direction had long been strained —in some quarters beyond all further patient endurance. No matter who spoke to him, or what was said, he came the next Sunday with unabashed and smiling face. Some said they thought it was impossible to expel him; if removed from one door, he would be in again at another; or ejected one Sunday, he would return the following. His presence was a delight to the evil-doers, and a terror to the righteous. He was no respecter of persons. If anyone took him in hand for correction and rebuke, he invariably returned their attention with a little practical

joke. He could take off the deacons and leaders by imitating their ways and characteristics, so that it became dangerous for anyone to interfere with him. He was an Ishmaelite indeed, with whom there was no dissimulation. But even those who were hardest on him, and had suffered most from his irrepressible spirit, were obliged to admit that there was a fine frank nature behind this strange and rough exterior. And almost every one was compelled to observe, even if they never admitted, that there were flashes of uncommon goodness about the boy, and remarkable possibilities for evil or for usefulness.

A crisis was finally reached one Sunday during the public service in the morning, when it so happened that Mr. Jarman was not present. Perhaps if he had been, the conduct of Dibs might not have reached such an outrageous pitch as it did. For a Sunday or two members of the choir, with whom Dibs was usually on amicable terms, had complained of his behaviour as the cause of uncontrollable laughter, quite upsetting the gravity of those who could see him, especially the young lady who was said 'to manage the harmonium,' whose very particular friend was the librarian, who, since the Sunday when Dibs gave so much trouble on being 'run in' to the vestry, had seemed to owe him a kind of grudge. This young lady was *vis-à-vis* to Dibs, and as she was not musically infallible, at the same time nervous and in love, it often happened that she made

many mistakes in playing the tunes. Every time this occurred Dibs responded by squinting at her, or manifesting his disapproval by facial expression. Dibs' quick ear let nothing go by unnoticed, and his form of criticism was judged to be a nuisance, and said to be 'too bad,' although one or two more musical thought the errors the more faulty. However, the lady complained to the librarian of bass voice, and he soon informed Mr. Tubbs, who in his turn urged Dibs to desist, saying, as usual, 'he would have none of his impudence.' The librarian told him that if it occurred again he would take the law into his own hands and deal with him in the yard behind the chapel. Other causes of unpleasantness had arisen, as they will in choirs, like 'accidents in the best regulated families.'

One children's hymn was always sung during the morning service, and on this particular Sunday it was Dibs' special favourite, 'Jesus comes, the heavens adoring;' and never before had the boy's voice been so full and clear; all who heard him remembered it. Sweet above all the voices was his carol of melody. The second verse he took as a solo—

'Jesus comes again in mercy,
When our hearts are bowed with care;
Jesus comes again in answer
To an earnest heartfelt prayer.'

Then broke in the chorus—

'Hallelujah!
Comes to save us from despair.'

There was no mistake; simple as the words and tune were, the fine tone of unconscious power and pathos thrilled all hearts, children young and old—even the infirm listened to every note. He held up his face to the heavens and poured his whole soul forth, until the music quivered with the feeling. Had some birds from a forest glade found words in the clear glory of summer morning? or had an angel from the golden gates swept down and sung a strain from the invisible choirs on high? None could tell; but when the boy had finished the tears were running down his face—all were moved, from the oldest to the youngest, and many of the congregation were weeping. Though no one knew it, the boy's voice had been heard for the last time in that chapel.

Mr. Tubbs was so pleased that he had made up his mind to give him a shilling for having done so well. Everybody forgot his faults and bad behaviour, and many could hardly refrain from applause. When he finished, quite an audible murmur ran through the chapel, and even the chin of Mrs. Snowls was seen to bibber.

Whether it was the rebound from this emotion or not, the real reason for Dibs' subsequent conduct was never known. During the long prayer he drew himself up by his arms, balanced himself horizontally on a pew, then deposited himself into the pew in front, dropping down on his hands and raising his feet and legs perpendicu-

larly close beside the lady player, clapping his feet together just against her head. He had accomplished this feat with such agility and rapidity, that she knew nothing of the movement until his heels were almost in her face. She screamed with surprise, and went off into hysterics; the minister opened his eyes, to see Dibs standing on his head in the table-pew, leisurely kicking his heels into space, the greatest confusion among the singers, and some of the congregation in audible fits of laughter. Mr. Tubbs and the librarian had gone to assist the lady in her distress, and Dibs had his opportunity all to himself undisturbed for some seconds, until the minister thundered forth—

'Will no one turn that boy right side up?'

Then he was hauled and cuffed into his proper attitude, while the minister enlarged on the enormity of his misconduct, and spoke in burning words of his disgraceful behaviour, expelling him from the service and school, forbidding him ever to enter the place again. One or two then pushed him out into

the aisle. He shook himself free from his assailants, saying loudly he'd go out all right if they'd leave him alone. In an instant he catherine-wheeled himself down the passage, to the horror of the whole congregation, whooped loudly when he reached the door, made a clown's bow to the minister, and bounded out, leaving the thunder-stricken choir and congregation to recover from their amazement and consternation.

CHAPTER X.

EXCOMMUNICATED.

Lord, Thou art the Seeker and the Finder;
For Thou hast sought the lost, and found Thine own.
Help me to seek and find, that I may be
Seeker and finder till I'm lost in Thee.

DIBS' expulsion from the sanctuary was an event that did not weigh heavily on his conscience. The only cause of uneasiness was the thought of what Mr. Jarman would feel about it. As for the loss of the singing, the conventional restraints that accompanied it were so heavy a handicap to its enjoyment, that he felt a sense of relief in being free from all further obligation to Mr. Tubbs. But his personal regard for his teacher gave him shame and sorrow. At first he resolved to go to school and let the episode of the morning make no difference, not being sure how far the prohibition of the pastor extended. He felt a little anxious to effect an entrance into the school if he could, were it only to gain a triumph over his enemies. And yet he felt he dare not meet Mr. Jarman. He knew he had done a wrong toward his kind friend, though he had

not meant to grieve him. The injury to his teacher was accidental to the incident, but he knew it was there; he knew his conduct would stab the man he thought most of. So, like our first parents in the up-waking to conscious transgression against goodness, he hid himself, and would not go near the school that afternoon.

When Mr. Jarman arrived at the school, he soon learnt the news about Dibs' outrageous performance, and the way the minister had rebuked and dismissed him from the place. Mr. Jarman at once went to the superintendent, to know if Dibs were expelled from the school by what the minister said. Mr. Snowls thought not necessarily, but said he would ask the teachers to remain behind and decide the case; in the meantime he had given order that if Dibs appeared he was not to enter the school until the teachers had pronounced upon the minister's verdict; but he was to be called aside, and the situation explained to him, should he come.

However, Dibs made no attempt to gain admission that day. The teaching passed off, and when the classes were dismissed the teachers remained. Mr. Snowls in solemn tones introduced the subject, repeated the facts, and said it was for the teachers to say whether Dibs should remain a scholar or not. It was not, he maintained, for the pastor to dictate who should be in the school and who not, but of course his opinion on the question would have great weight. He concluded by saying that he did not like expelling any, because Christ

came to seek and save the lost. But he could not help going beyond scriptural authority, and saying, 'Order was heaven's first law,' and when Lucifer disobeyed it, he was cast out of heaven, remaining, as he assured the teachers, outside the portals of light even unto this day.

It was very evident the teachers were generally in favour of the boy's removal. For the sake of the whole school it was well to make an example of one. No corporal punishment being allowed, it was the only way in which judgment on the incorrigible could be manifested. Arguments of policy and precedent of other schools were used. After most had spoken in favour of enforcing the minister's verdict, Mr. Jarman got up and said something to this effect: That he was wholly opposed to a school carried on under Gospel principles expelling any boy or girl, however bad. He faced the two most serious difficulties, first for the school to reverse the decision of the pastor, which might bring about a dead lock; but he thought with wise counsel that difficulty might be removed. The whole matter must be considered entirely on its own merit, and not because of the possibly unpleasant circumstances that might happen if they did what they thought right. Then he came to the moral effect on the school of having the boy there after his conduct in chapel. He knew what effect it might have, namely, to undermine all discipline and control; but, on the other hand, if the school were told why he was not expelled,

there was the opportunity of lifting the whole moral and spiritual tone of school into a higher and more Christ-like character.

His strongest plea was for personal consideration of the boy. He gave the teachers what he knew of his history—a motherless waif, kicked up amid oaths and curses, with only the lowest surroundings—a hungry, ignorant outcast, without one advantage or privilege, except the right to know the same poverty and want that Jesus knew. The boy had the strongest claim on their pity and their patience, only because he had the same claim on Divine compassion and mercy. Because the lad had never known the meaning of the words tenderness and affection, it was the more reason why the school of Christ should teach him the law of love and forgiveness. He urged, in rough speech and broken grammar, all the extenuating circumstances and conditions he could—the boy's bringing up, the impossibility for him to realize the associations of reverence and worship they had with the sanctuary; besides, he maintained that, bad as the boy's conduct was in service, in God's sight it was not worse and less hypocritical than some of their own wicked and wandering thoughts, or than some of the playing, flirting, and trifling he had seen among the choir and the teachers at times. He said he knew more about Dibs than all the school put together, but he had no hesitation in saying that the boy was a diamond in the rough; he was an odd,

eccentric, wild child of the street; but what else could be expected?

Put a young bull in a china shop, and let it become tired of standing still, what is likely to become of the crockery? or harness an unbroken colt, fresh from the New Forest, to an apple-cart, and begin to drive it through the streets of London, why, where would you and the apples be? And God made Dibs with his nature just as He made wild deer and goats, that behave all right on the open mountain side, but would become awfully troublesome in your back kitchen or garden. In homely language he spoke his conviction that Dibs' was a noble heart, and as open to receive the Spirit of God as any of them present; his fault was not wickedness, but an overflow of animal life and spirit, of uncontrollable humour and fun. He reminded the teachers of God's gracious dealing with His erring children, 'how David was not all they would like a church member to be, and how Abraham seemed to forget himself and not speak the truth, but God did not cast them away.'

His voice grew more earnest and tremulous with emotion when he said, 'I have tried to put myself in his place, believing the Father of him and me sent him into this 'ere class of mine, to teach me to learn of Him who was meek and lowly in heart, and be a bit more like Him in long-suffering and patience; and depend upon it the rougher and ruder the chap is we 'as to deal

with, it's only the more of the gentleness of Jesus that is needed to fetch 'im in. I thinks it was just such a ragged urchin as He calked to His side of old, and the sight of just another like Dibs, as made Him say, when He seed 'im, "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." And as long as them here textes bides, "For God so loved the world that *whosoever*," and that He saves "unto the *uttermost*," I shall never vote for turning any out from this school, or none other. And if this is a school for Christ, we are here to teach His words, "I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." And I make bold to say that if I held my hand up for expelling that boy, and shutting the doors of this here place of worship in his face and soul, that as sure as I am a living man to-day I should hear them t'other words—

"For I was an hungered, and ye gave ME no meat;
I was thirsty, and ye gave ME no drink;
I was a stranger, and ye took ME not in;
Naked, and ye clothed ME not;
Sick and in prison, and ye visited ME not.
Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to *one* of these ye did it not unto ME. Therefore—
Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."'

With these words, uttered in the white-heat of intense emotion, he sat down.

There was a long and awkward pause. The secre-

tary said at length he thought they ought to come to something practical, that Mr. Jarman in his speech seemed to be preaching at the teachers at one time, and then thinking he was a lawyer or barrister addressing a jury; but while quite sure Mr. Jarman meant very well, it was all too airy and so high up that they didn't know where he was, and no school in London, or anywhere else, could be carried on after that style. The reason lay here. Mr. Jarman hadn't got any children of his own, and so he had got a rather fanciful way of dealing with other people's. He believed in the stick, and the boy deserved a jolly good thrashing, and unless that was given him first, he moved the boy's name be taken off the book, 'as we want to be going.'

The librarian, Mr. Snowls, junior, who was unmarried, but hoped to be some day, said, 'He was practical, and begged to second the secretary's motion, because he had kept his eye on Dibs, and though it had seen some bad 'uns, there was not a boy that could beat him for cheek, he was that mischievous the school was better without him.' He concluded by saying, 'When there was a Jonah on board any ship, whether he were an old 'un or a young 'un, he was always for chucking 'em over. It was the shortest and easiest way with 'em.'

The motion was then put for the resolution. Five hands were up; on the contrary, one hand only; but the

majority had not the courage to express an opinion. They had meant to vote for expelling Dibs, but, after Mr. Jarman's appeal, even those who had advocated it could not lift up a hand to enforce it. So the boy was dismissed from the Sunday-school on earth by a majority of four. His name was removed from the roll before all the scholars on the following Sunday, after a solemn address on the Ten Virgins, and the text, 'The door was shut.' Mr. Snowls did his best, as he thought, to improve the occasion.

But, by the irony of fate, the Sunday-school lesson for the day happened to be the healing of the man that was born blind, and was finally cast out of the synagogue. But when 'Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and when He had found him,' He revealed Himself to the once blind beggar. And the study of this lesson did much to comfort Mr. Jarman, who had been greatly disheartened by the treatment of Dibs. The boy had not come to Mr. Jarman's house for his weekly lesson, because he felt too ashamed to meet the mild rebuke of his teacher's presence. When the evening had passed, and Dibs had failed to appear, the next night, Mr. Jarman, on his return from work, went round after tea to look for him; but, of course, he was not in; he went once or twice, but all to no purpose; Dibs was never in when he called.

As Silly Billy was always hanging about the court, he observed these calls for Dibs. He told him a friend had

been to see him. Dibs guessed who this visitor might be, and, without any more evidence than the disjointed mutterings of the half-idiot, he felt it must be Mr. Jarman, or some one from the school, come to see about him and his bad conduct. He determined he would go to school as usual next Sunday, and tell Mr. Jarman he was sorry if he'd upset the parson, and made him get his monkey up in chapel before all the congregation, because he didn't know he was so short in his temper. This was Dibs' view of the situation, but he was really sorry if his conduct had grieved his teacher.

Sunday afternoon came, and Dibs, who had not met any of his Sunday-school class, having been at work with his father, doing odd jobs at the theatre, went off to the chapel, thinking he would not be early, making sure that Mr. Jarman would be there first. He arrived after the opening had begun, to find the secretary at the door, who said to him at once,

'Well, and what do you want here?'

'To see Mr. Jarman, and go into my class,' said Dibs, as unconcerned as possible.

'Then you'll do no such thing. Do you know you are expelled from the school, and last Sunday your name was taken off the book, because you are a good-for-nothing young vagabond, and are a nuisance and disgrace to the whole place?'

'That don't make no difference to me. You go in and tell Mr. Jarman I'm here, and wants to see 'im.

I'll wager my head to a chine orange he'll come. I'll behave me'sel all right.'

'I shall do no such thing; besides, Mr. Jarman wouldn't come out of his class to speak to a young rip like you, when you 'ave been kicked out of the school.'

'That's a lie, and you go to ——,' said Dibs, fiercely looking how he could force his way in.

'Now, none of yer bad language here,' said the irritated secretary. 'I tell yer, if you make any disturbance I'll send for the bobby and have you taken up. Here's Mr. Snowls coming.'

When Mr. Snowls, who at the lower end of the chapel had heard the noise at the door, came out into the lobby, he felt a pang of reproach on seeing Dibs, and, without making any inquiry, said,

'Come, come, you'd better go away quietly. It's too late now; I hope this'll be a lesson to you. I'm very

sorry for you, but it's no good; you can't come in here any more.'

When Dibs saw the two officials he knew he could not get in at that door, and thought discretion the better part of valour, especially as one or two passers-by were observing. He had no desire to be publicly lectured by Mr. Snowls, who seemed quite ready to improve the occasion with a parting word of exhortation. And just at this juncture the boy caught sight of a policeman slowly coming down the street. This confirmed his opinion, and he fled, leaving the school and chapel, never more to enter them, or again to darken the doors of a place of worship, leaving the two officials at the door, one sorry he hadn't boxed the boy's ears before they parted, and the other moved with real regret that it was too late to have the boy back again in class.

That night, as father and son were together in their wretched dwelling, Dibs said,

'Father, why don't you live nearer your work?'

'Because it's so uncertain, and here's as good as anywhere else; but I 'av thought a good bit about it now you've got some job there.'

'I am tired of being here,' said Dibs.

'Well, so am I, for the matter of that.'

And that night they resolved to go. The new site for their residence did not give them much trouble to procure. A room in Gloucester Street, not far from the

New Cut and Waterloo Station, was selected; and on the following Saturday they had migrated, to the great surprise of the neighbours, and to the tears of poor Silly Billy, when he found out his friend had vanished from the district.

CHAPTER XI.

THE THEATRE.

'Such Songs have the power to quiet
The Restless pulse of Care,
And come like benedictions
That follow after prayer.'—*Longfellow.*

DIBS was sorry to find himself suddenly removed from his friends, but he felt he could not bear to see Mr. Jarman. He knew that his conduct must have grieved him; and since he was kept out of the school, he had too strong a sense of shame to go to Mr. Jarman's house to tell him he was sorry for his conduct, because he knew he must be disgraced in his sight.

His father, being a workman at the theatre, had been the means for procuring the boy odd jobs both by night

and day, so that he was constantly hanging about the place, and getting more or less employment. Therefore, when the preparation time came for the Christmas pantomime, he stood some chance of an engagement for the season. Long before the time, innumerable applications had been made. It was miserable work for little children, and wretched pay. But for the parents it brought money, and for the children the dressing and music; the unreal world of the footlights had a romance and spell that held both a charm and a mystery, until they sickened and tired of the long training and hours of weariness, as well as the monotony of the performance.

Most of the children who took any part in the pantomime were connected by parents or friends with the stage; but as these did not always supply raw material of size and quality enough, a draw was made from the general public. It was a competition in which all competitors shared alike, and the most suitable were selected from the entire body of applicants.

The day for making the first formal investigation came, and with it a large crowd of children, some with mothers or elder sisters, surging round the stage door. The children were let in by groups by the doorkeeper, who, knowing some of those indirectly or directly connected with the profession, would give them what preference he could, if they had not been allowed an entrance previously.

Dibs was permitted to struggle in with the first batch

They were marched up on to the dark stage through many series of scenery frames and overhanging rolled-up blinds, with gas jets burning here and there, surrounded by wire globes. The dreariest and dirtiest sensations of daylight from skylights in the roof fell on the pit in front, and the yawning empty galleries that reached to the ceiling struggled dimly into the great cavernous recesses of the immense stage, which from its wide mouth made the whole area of vacant tiers of seats and benches, boxes and railings, look comparatively small. The bare brick walls and the intricacies of stage appliances appeared dungeon-like. The dingy look of all the furniture and bits of scenery came out more and more, as eyes coming in from the daylight became accustomed to the dim light of sun and gas, that gave what illumination there was on the stage. The lads stood in an irregular row before the stage manager, who was engaging the small hands for their 'professional' duties. A few were definitely settled on, some told to stand aside, and others dismissed as totally useless.

The stage manager sat on the stage with a good clear space in front of him, and a little table in front, one or two artists were standing about; a man was directing the children, and near him stood a clerk with a book and pencil.

'Next lad!' said the manager as he sent a little one off, as wholly incapable of service.

Then Dibs stepped up to the table, and made a salutation from his forelock.

'Let's see, you're Mark Sewell's boy, are you not? what is it they all call you?'

'Dibs, sir.'

'Well, what can you do, sing or dance? have you ever performed before?'

'I have never acted a proper part. I can sing; I've sung at pubs for coppers, and also in a choir.'

'Well, I hope you'll never act a more improper part than that,' said the manager smiling. 'What song can you sing?'

Dibs paused, and looked very awkward, and said,

'I can't call one to mind.'

'Never mind, sing a verse of anything you know; I only want to hear your voice.'

Then Dibs cleared his throat, in as important a way as he could, and began in his clear sweet voice to sing:

'Jesus came, the heavens adoring,
Came with peace from realms on high;
Jesus came for man's redemption,
Slowly came on earth to die.
Hallelujah!
Came in deep humility.'

Every word sounded forth with distinct articulation, the manager's attention was instantly arrested, he followed each word and note. The accents of a hymn at such a time and place, wedded to such melody of song, drew workmen and assistants from all sorts of places and

hidden recesses to see and hear, inmates from the dressing-rooms crept out to observe and listen. When the verse ended, the manager, without taking his eyes off the singer, or noticing the audience, of which Dibs was wholly unconscious, said,

'Go on.'

Then carolled the boy,

'Jesus comes again in mercy.'

All sounds and hum of conversation died away, as the listeners noiselessly increased, and the verse closed with the line,

'Comes to save us from despair.'

All ears and hearts too were listening; a pause followed; no word was spoken, the look of the manager was enough for the boy, his pale face turned upward, half looking toward the vacant auditorium, began again to pour forth the strain with a thrilling intensity:

'Jesus comes to hearts rejoicing,
Bringing news of sins forgiven;
Jesus comes in sounds of gladness,
Leading souls redeemed to heaven.
Hallelujah!'

Clearer and stronger still rose the voice, as if he might be singing alone to the angels who watch at the gate of Paradise—

'Now the gate of death is riven.'

The manager was so deeply touched he could scarcely speak; Dibs took the silence as the consent to continue,

'Jesus comes in joy and sorrow,
Shares alike our hopes and fears;
Jesus comes whate'er befalls us,
Glads our hearts and dries our tears.
Hallelujah!
Cheering e'en our failing years.'

The pause came once more. The pathos of those simple words had moved all who heard them. It was almost more than the manager could bear. He said,

'That'll do.'

Dibs, who by this time was heart and soul in the singing, didn't like being shorn of a verse, and, wholly unconscious of the remarkable effect he was producing, said,

'There ain't only one more vus, and if it ain't the best, it's a good 'un.'

The manager nodded approval, placed his elbow on the table, and his forehead on the palm of his hand; other days and memories came back upon him. Another voice in the far-off purity of childhood, a woman's voice who sang his first lullaby, had told him the beautiful story of 'the Good Shepherd,' and with it her love came back to him as the thin ragged lad had sung,

'Jesus comes whate'er befalls us,
Cheering e'en our failing years.

The nod was all Dibs needed; off went the last verse,

'Jesus comes on clouds triumphant,
When the heavens shall pass away;
Jesus comes again in glory,
Let us then our homage pay.'

Louder and louder still burst forth the notes until the 'Hallelujah' seemed to pierce the dark recesses of the stage, and go from the pit to the top gallery, and rise beyond rafters and roof; up it went from the midst of that odd and motley group about the stage there in the dirty, dingy theatre in the great city, with its old river rushing seaward, as it had done since the time when it swayed the osiers on its bank by Bermondsey Abbey, when its eddying currents were watched in solitude by barefoot monks—there from the dense heart of mighty London up floated the hymn beyond the streets and chimneys, from the stage-life of human existence above the skylight of earth the shout of praise went forth—

'Jesus comes! Hallelujah!
Till the dawn of endless day.'

And so the voice and hymn died into the smoke of the great city, and passed into the clouds of the sky to live again in the light of God, and to linger for ever in the hearts and minds of those who heard this message from on high that had visited the listeners that day.

When the song was over there was a long stillness. Many were moved to tears; none seemed willing to break the spell; till the ragged lad, with his face ashy white from emotion, and trembling from the overmastering influence that stirred him, looked at the manager's half-hidden face, and said,

'That's all.'

Then the spell was broken, a murmur of what might have been applause followed. The crowd began to disperse as if by magic; many were glad to escape, to recover the feelings they could not hide. One girl, who was a dancer, and had lately lost her only sister, was especially sensitive to the message the song had brought to her. It seemed that from the sunny fields of Eden a bird had been wafted and had dropped at her feet a word of mercy and of hope. There was one man who stood almost transfixed, and remained staring at Dibs some seconds after others began to move away. That was the boy's father, who told one of the dressers afterwards,

'When I 'erd 'im singing I didn't know 'im till I thought it must be Dibs a standing there, and that he was a listening to a hangel singing somewhere or other about the place.'

'I didn't know as how any boy could sing so beautiful. I began to feel as if I'd been to church. I shouldn't 'ave been no ways surprised if some one hadn't begun for to pronounce the benediction, and any one might have made a collection on the spot, and they'd ave got a good 'un too,' said old Mrs. Titherage, who always did her work in the theatre with her bonnet turned down on the top of her head, and the strings fluttering behind her shoulders.

Dibs had an interview with the manager afterwards that proved highly satisfactory. He was to take a

leading part in one of the scenes—to assume, in fact, the character of a youthful king. First he was to be a poor village boy despised and forsaken, then at the touch of a fairy's wand he was to be transformed into a prince, and finally he was to become King of the Golden River; in each character he was to sing a song, and in the last to wear a make-believe crown of gold, to be surrounded by a troop of small courtiers protected by an army of boy-soldiers.

That night the boy could hardly sleep for excitement, and 'mid the wildest thoughts of his imagination he could not help a feeling of sadness that would linger, do what he would, for he knew well that Mr. Jarman would be grieved. And when at length he fell asleep his dreams of the theatre were strangely blended with the class in the Sunday-school, and his teacher's words about the crown of life that fadeth not away.

The selected children had to begin the training at once; when the first blush of novelty had worn off, the long drilling and exercising in preparation proved to be a hard and cruel time. The wearying monotony taxed the boy's patience beyond bearing, errors and mistakes were connected with sharp words and blows. Dibs found it worse discipline than any school, and now he was so carefully watched by the School Board inspector that he was compelled to put in an attendance, because he had played truant so often that at last his father was summoned. This brought down fresh trouble at home,

and the consequence was he was both thrashed and starved—the only forms of punishment his father ever inflicted.

The boy, although remarkably muscular, wiry and agile, was not strong in the chest: the strain and excitement of the rehearsals were beginning to tell upon his constitution. The days and weeks moved slowly on, and the efficiency of the piece was rapidly advancing. The manager was looking forward to making a great hit with Dibs for this season's pantomime.

With the approach of Christmas all was to be in readiness. Dibs had taken all the pains he could to perfect himself in his part.

The week before the opening night had come. Christmas Day fell that year on a Sunday, so Boxing Day was Monday. Dibs had caught a bad cold. Feeling very ill, he had gone to the rehearsal; though he tried hard, he could scarcely sing at all. It was a cold, foggy day. He went back coughing fearfully; in the night he was taken worse. His father got alarmed; knowing the last and full dress rehearsal was on Saturday, he went for the doctor. He came after a long delay, and said the boy had a bad attack of inflammation of the lungs, and was hardly likely to get better, and wholly unable to go out on the following day for the final rehearsal. The father at once took the news to the theatre. The manager, though greatly annoyed, sent a kind message back. All who heard the tidings were concerned, for Dibs was a general favourite,

in spite of being one of the most troublesome boys that ever trod the streets of London. And when his father returned again it was to realize in full horror that there was a decided change for the worse, and that the boy—the only thing left him in all the world that he cared for beyond beer and wages—was very seriously ill, and might be dying.

CHAPTER XII.

NEVERTHELESS AFTERWARD.

'After the burden release,
After the cloud the sun,
After repentance peace,
Rest when the day is done.'

THE Saturday passed slowly by—a dull, thick, foggy day, raw and cold and dark. The cough was tearing the poor feverish and suffering boy. The hours moved on, the sounds, both far and near, getting strangely blended in dozes of sleep, from which he was wakened again and again. The father had to be away most of the day and long into the night. A woman who had the down-stairs floor was kind, and came in if he knocked on the floor with a stick; she attended to the fire, and did her best to look after this sick singer in his rough nest. Some of the children and neighbours peeped in to see him. One boy of his acquaintance had called, and after some hesitation, before leaving, presented Dibs with two

marbles of special value, united to a large bulls-eye strong of the odour of peppermint, which he had been squeezing up in his dirty hand during the interview. Other tokens of kindness were given more or less inappropriate, but pathetic in their revelation of sympathy. When the doctor came he said the patient was no better; he could only pull through with the greatest care; above all, he said he was to be kept quite quiet. It would be best for him to see no one.

His father, who had been up most of the night before, remained faithfully doing all he could, and through the hours of darkness after he returned on Saturday night.

It was a dreary Christmas Day. Sunday bells rang out with their joyous peal. Anthems of gladness rose from Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's; hundreds of paid choristers were chanting the praise of Christmas time, with its ineffable memories, and its more ineffable hopes. London with its thousands of churches and chapels, from its mitred prelates to its most unlettered local preacher, proclaimed the great fact that reversed the very flight of time—the advent of the Christ: the supreme truth of Christendom, that Jesus has come, the Saviour of all the world. And that vast city with its 10,000 public-houses, its 70 miles of drink traffic, open on this day, which commemorates the next greatest fact, namely the resurrection of Christ, and the eternal rest of God—London, with its multitude of the vicious, and its 80,000 paupers, with its wealth and poverty, its vice in West

and East, its sin and crime, its squalor and misery, and its pain and suffering, its greed and lust, declares also how far the life of this centre of civilization is from the true realization of that Spirit of Christ, whose birth in Bethlehem the day commemorates. Throughout the lingering hours of this Christmas Day, with its happy greetings and merry reunions, bright fireside and family rejoicings, in this back street near Waterloo Station, lay dying this bird of song, watched by his desolate father, in whose heart there mingled those strange conflicts of hope with fear, and fear with hope.

The darkness had gathered; the light of the fire, that flickered and glowed, made the dim outline of the objects in the room visible; the consuming embers and falling ashes were the only sound, save the wheezing and occasional cough from the bed.

Footsteps on the stairs brought a murmur of suffering from Dibs, then the door opened, and the woman said in a loud whisper, 'Here's some'un who says he must see you, lad.'

His father rose from the chair where he had been dozing, and the voice of a man said, 'I am his teacher in the Sunday-school.'

'Mr. Jarman!' exclaimed Dibs, starting up. 'Ah, Mr. Jarman, I am so——' the voice was half choked with tears and coughing.

Mr. Jarman went to the bedside, the father busied himself to light the lamp, the woman went down.

For a little no word was spoken. Mr. Jarman took the boy's hand; he tried to give his awkward shake, but the little squeeze that followed made speech impossible to Mr. Jarman for some seconds. Both knew that those invisible strands of union were not broken, nor even unloosed by absence; so fine are the revelations of affection, that those who have thus felt them can never question their immortality in hours of deepest need.

Mr. Jarman, when he found words to speak, did not ask how Dibs was or felt—he saw too plainly how ill he was. He told how he had tried to find where he had moved to, and how Crop had been hunting for him, 'until he learnt, on Friday or Saturday, you were in the pantomime company, and came over to see you, heard you were ill, and discovered where you lived; but the woman downstairs would not let him come

up, so this afternoon at school he told me all he knew, and I started off at once, following his direction, to this place.'

If Mr. Jarman stopped for a few seconds, Dibs said, 'You ain't going, are you, Mr. Jarman?'

'No, not yet,' would come the reply in kind tones. At intervals Mr. Jarman addressed the father, of whom he asked a few questions about the patient and his illness. Then he would turn to Dibs and tell him about the things that would interest him, and news of the boys in the class.

Dibs was very restless and uneasy, and burning hot, with a cough so cruel that every fit made Mr. Jarman wince to hear it. Several times he seemed to make an effort to say something, but would give up his attempts as being too much for him.

Every movement of Mr. Jarman Dibs watched, and said, 'Don't leave me,' or 'Don't go.'

After a time Mr. Jarman said, 'Well, Dibs, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll go back home and tell my missus how poorly you are, for she does not know where I am, and then I'll come back and sit the night with you, so that your father can have a lay down and sleep.'

Dibs smiled his thanks, and his father said, 'Now, thank ye, that's kind; the lad would sooner have yer than any one to be along with 'im. He thinks a deal of his teacher. If you would stay with 'im about a quarter of an hour, I'd go out, for there's one or two things as

wants seeing to and getting ; besides, I must go to the doctor's for the medicine.'

Mr. Jarman promised he would stay till the father came back, then he would go home and return for the night.

Directly the father left the room, Dibs motioned to be propped up a bit. There was no pillow, only a hard bolster. It was with some difficulty Mr. Jarman was able to find anything to support the lad. The sheets were dark with age, the old horse-cloth that served as blanket and coverlet still more advanced in service ; and this over a hard straw mattress, so worn in use that the straw was working through, all bore witness to the neglect and hardship of his lot.

When Mr. Jarman had done what he could to make matters a little more comfortable, and had put his own great-coat round the boy's shoulders, and the difficult breathing permitted, Dibs said, 'I have wanted to see you.' A pause for some seconds. 'I don't think I'm going to get well again ;' and then with great nervous excitement he continued, 'I am sorry I made that row in your chapel, Mr. Jarman. I don't care for old Snowls or the t'other chap that's boss of the place, but I never thought they would keep me out of your class. I did come to see you, and tell you I was sorry, and I'd 'av never kicked up no more noise than I could help. If you'd wished it, I 'ud 'a told the whole school the same. I wanted to do what was fair. But

them beauties at the door ordered me off, or said they would call the bobby if I didn't go, so I slanged them with the worst words I knew. They don't treat you as fair in your chapel as they do in the ring; but I am sorry.'

After this Mr. Jarman said, 'It was a mistake. I don't think you did have a fair chance, and I told them so at the meeting we had.'

'Did you?' said Dibs, with a superb look of trust in his friend.

'Why didn't you come and see me?' inquired the teacher.

'I thought about it many a time, and was very nigh adoing so once or twice. I knew I hadn't done right, and was ashamed to come to you; beside, I didn't know how bad you might think I 'ad been, then I felt I didn't deserve all you—all you been to me.'

'I knew how you would feel,' said Mr. Jarman; 'and though I hoped you might come, I did not expect it.'

Another look of relief and trust, and the tears were flowing, not from pain and regret, but from being understood, and therefore forgiven and reconciled.

Mr. Jarman said, 'I did not feel hurt, though I was sorry. I try never to think about myself. I wondered how God must feel about it.'

'I knew,' said Dibs, as soon as he could speak, 'I had done a lot of worse things than to make some of 'em laugh in chapel; but somehow it seemed like a fearful

sin, and it's made me feel awful bad. Then I 'ave thought if you knew what lots of wickedness I 'ave meant to do, and p'rhaps been afraid to do, you'd know I was too bad to speak to, for I felt sure you would be sorry ; and I thought if this 'ere upsets 'im, which's next to nothing to speak of partic'lar wrong, what would you do if you knew the worst about me.'

'That is just what I feel about my own and everybody's character. People make a deal of fuss about this and that not being right, but some of them things is nothink compared to all the evil of our hearts, our selfishness, pride, and uncharitableness. Then I thinks this 'ere's the real feeling of sorrow for wrong, not fear of punishment or being found out, nor whether 'tis a losing or winning game, but that what we 'ave done is against eternal love and goodness, and the patience, pity, and gentleness of Jesus, is the worst of sins. And then I knows it's only just as we gives our whole self to God, "lose our life," as Christ said, that the Father fully forgives us, and we know it, and we feel His Peace.'

The conversation was soon after interrupted by the return of the father and by the exhaustion of the sufferer. When Mr. Jarman had laid the boy down and touched his hand, he set out through the slippery, slimy street, wrapt in yellow fog, made more mysterious by the street lamps only just visible one beyond another, and the enveloped buildings that did not loom up till close upon them.

Mr. Jarman told his wife the state of affairs, and how he had promised to return. She was very much concerned, and was anxious to do all she could for the relief of the sufferer. When her husband went back he took quite a load of small comforts for the boy, that he might have what ease and rest kindness could help to give Among other things were a good warm shawl and a soft pillow; this he said he must carry, because some unknown friend did not forget to put one in a boat, once on a time, when the Master was a-going on a night journey across a stormy sea; and like all things done for Him and for love's sake, it didn't fail of its purpose, for mid the passing tempest He was able to sleep upon it in peace.

And when Mrs. Jarman said something about the pillow being inconvenient to carry with the other things,

'Nay, nay, I can't leave that behind; it may be poor Dibs has a darker journey and rougher passage to take this night, across a stormier sea. At any rate, He'll be along with him in the bark; it may be he'll be landed safe by morning, and see the Master for 'isself. So the pillow must go anyhow, leastways since He said what's done to the poorest and smallest of 'em is kinder done to Him also. I 'ave always thought a deal on that chap who put the pillar in the boat, whoever he was. I wonder who on 'em it was, since no one shuved in his name.'

'I don't believe it was a man at all—it ain't like 'em to think of a pillar; and you wouldn't now neither, if it

hadn't a bin for that there story. I thinks 'twas a woman or a child.'

'Very likely you be right. Good-night, missus,' said he, and stepped out into the darkness.

The fog was lifting, the gas-lights could be seen further down the street; it was very cold and frosty, and through the thinning atmosphere the stars could be dimly seen. He went as quickly as he could through the now silent and deserted street; but when he arrived at the bed-side of the dying boy, it was to have no doubt that for him the night of life was far spent, the day was at hand.

The father had not noticed the gradual change, and said, 'I think he seems better—his cough is quieter, he is easier, and a bit inclined to sleep.'

They arranged the bed and made all as comfortable as they could, to which effort Dibs smiled his thanks, and murmured in his favourite language of the ring that he felt quite squared up. He was evidently pleased with the shawl, and especially the pillow.

The night moved onwards. Mr. Jarman sat thinking, Dibs needed little attention, only something to drink at intervals. The restlessness was passing away; so calm and still was all around at times that Mr. Jarman could hear the ticking of his own watch. Little was said; the father slept heavily and deeply. By-and-by Dibs opened his eyes wide and looked round, as if awakened from a dream, and hardly realizing where he was. Mr. Jarman asked if he wanted anything.

'No,' said the boy, gazing at Mr. Jarman; 'I suppose I was dreaming, but I feel almost well—the pain has gone. What's the time?'

'It's about five o'clock,' was the reply.

'It's Boxing Day; and did you know that to-day I was to be crowned a king and sing a song as King of the Golden River? It wasn't going to be a real crown, only a make-believe one. I 'ave thought a deal about them other crowns as never fades away. Do you think there's one for me?'

'I am sure there is.'

'Could you sing to me?' inquired Dibs.

'No,' said Mr. Jarman; 'I am sorry to say I ain't a singer.'

'But you can say "Jesus came," can't you?'

Mr. Jarman tried his best, Dibs followed every word, and prompted the first line in every verse, 'Jesus comes again in mercy.'

At the end of the third verse he asked the meaning of the last word in the last line, 'Now the gate of death is riven.'

Mr. Jarman briefly told him, and the boy, satisfied, prompted the beginning of the next line, 'Jesus comes in joy and sorrow.' The last verse Mr. Jarman could scarcely remember at all; Dibs tried to finish it himself, actually singing the last refrain, 'Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Till the dawn of endless day.'

The exertion was too much for him; he did not

speak again. Mr. Jarman took the thin wasted hand in his, and knelt down beside the bed and prayed to the Unseen Presence that was so close to them both. He rose and sat down near the boy, saying little texts he thought might comfort him. The breathing grew more quiet and regular, until it was quite evident he was in a calm and peaceful sleep. Mr. Jarman dozed; he woke suddenly by the noise outside—the patient was still 'asleep on a pillar.' He rose, stirred the fire—the first grey signs of a cold winter's dawn were just visible—turned down the lamp, drew up the blind. He was going to resume his watch, when he turned, struck by the strange silence, and looked at the still, white face. Truly the morning had come and taken him to itself.

Mr. Jarman instantly woke the father, who got up bewildered from his long sleep, saying, 'Has the light gone out? Ain't there no oil in the lamp? What! is it morning? How's Dibs?'

'He needs no light of candle any more, the night has gone out for him—he is in the morning that has no end,' said Mr. Jarman.

The realization of the loss was a great trouble to the broken-hearted father. Every one felt for the desolate man; Mr. Jarman wanted him to come back and stay with him till after the funeral. But he said, No, he would bide along of the lad while aught was left that had been him. The funeral came. Mr. Jarman went to

Bow Cemetery with the father. Crop and many old pals were at the grave, and among those who had come to show their regard for their friend was Silly Billy, who kept muttering that Dibs had gone to be with Jesus in the big Sunday-school above.

They had listened to the words, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.'

On the return, Mr. Jarman told Dibs' father that some years ago he and his missus had lost a little baby about six weeks old; and when he heard these words he could not feel reconciled—the thought that the Lord had *taken* their baby did not make the loss less, for no one likes to have his best taken from him. But he said, 'Some Sundays after I had to explain the lesson of Abraham offering up his son Isaac. I had always been afraid of that chapter, for I couldn't understand it; but now I seemed to see better some meaning that was all right, and when we *give* our dearest treasures to God we can't lose them, and there's a sight of comfort in giving up—it's better than the taking away. Besides, where the treasure is, there will the heart be also.'

In this way Mr. Jarman dropped some good seed into a soil just ready to receive it.

The manager of the theatre was really touched when he heard that this boy, with the lovely power of song, and voice like a nightingale, had passed away. All the company had known Dibs from the day he had sung his favourite hymn as his trial effort for the stage; and

now a little collection was soon made to meet the funeral expenses for the father, and to erect a stone over the grave. The money came in well, and the too-late memorial of regard, like the sweet spices of the first Easter Day, could not be without significance; and beneath the name and date the legend ran:

> 'One more voice in the heavenly choir,
> And one more lamb in the fold.'

So the harvest comes after many days, and He who will be with us in the joyful reaping is with us when we go forth to sow in tears. Winter may be ours now, but by-and-by summer will come; for every loss and sorrow to-day may yield us 'nevertheless afterward' 'the peaceable fruits of righteousness.'

THE EPILOGUE.

One day the heavens grew black, a storm gathered, the wind rose, down came the pelting rain, the lightning flashed, the thunder roared and rattled long and loud, the trees swayed, and the pitiless tempest swept over the earth. Then the clouds lifted, the gusts of wind ceased, the sobbing subsided, the rain tears were stayed, the thunder rolled away, the fierce elements grew calm, the stillness of peace settled over all; and by-and-by

the smile grew out on the little garden, the sunshine stole into the heart of the drenched flowers, and all was radiant in gladness.

True picture of life's troubled day; but the darkness and the storm-wrack will pass away, the last sob will be hushed, and the last tear shed, for 'nevertheless afterward' will come the smile of God—and then, and then, O Paradise! O Paradise!

'Jesus came, the heavens adoring,
Came with peace from realms on high;
Jesus came for man's redemption,
Lowly came on earth to die.
Hallelujah!
Came in deep humility.

Jesus comes again in mercy,
When our hearts are bowed with care;
Jesus comes again in answer
To an earnest, heartfelt prayer.
Hallelujah!
Comes to save us from despair.

Jesus comes to hearts rejoicing,
Bringing news of sins forgiven;
Jesus comes in sounds of gladness,
Leading souls redeemed to heaven.
Hallelujah!
Now the gate of death is riven.

Jesus comes in joy and sorrow,
Shares alike our hopes and fears
Jesus comes, whate'er befalls us,
Glads our hearts and dries our tears
Hallelujah!
Cheering e'en our failing years.

Jesus comes on cloud triumphant,
When the heavens shall pass away;
Jesus comes again in glory;
Let us then our homage pay.
Hallelujah
Till the dawn of endless day.'

G. Thring.

THE END.

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